

S U E A N D I.

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SUE AND I.

CHAPTER I.

THE FERNS' STORY.

WHEN I was young I told stories.

I do not mean the kind of stories that make your dear mothers so sad if ever you stain your little lips by telling them. I did not tell *fib*s, only tales to amuse my brothers and sister. Roger and Ned would be quiet by the hour together, or as long as my powers of invention held out, while we all sat under the cedar on the lawn in summer, or round the school-room fire on winter afternoons. It was often very convenient to be able to keep the boys quiet if Sue and I had a great deal of doll's work on hand ; but the worst of it

was, that Sue herself would drop her work to listen.

Those days are far off now, but I tell stories still, and still to a Roger and a Ned and a little blue-eyed Sue. At times it almost seems to me that these are the same children, until something happens to remind me that I am not a child myself, and that the two boys lying on the grass at my feet are my nephews, not my brothers; as for the little niece nestling in my lap, there is no confusion in my mind about her, the other Sue never *did* sit in my lap; true, I was a good deal older than she was, but we were too near of age for that.

These little ones are very fond of getting me to tell them stories of the time when I was young; they seem to like true tales of such trifling incidents and childish pains and pleasures as make up their own lives, almost better than anything more strange and interesting in itself. A new book is often thrown aside, while they gather round me crying, "Tell us about when you were a little girl."

I am not surprised at this, because these are

THE FERNS' STORY.

just the sort of stories I like best to listen to myself. Do you wonder who tells me them? Do you think grown-up people never have stories told to them at all? Oh, what a mistake! So many things tell *me* stories. The sky for one, with its white clouds and painted sunsets; and the golden cowslips, and white violets, and plum-cake, and very thin bread and butter, and the tea-kettle. You can't think how many things tell tales of long ago to me, or how much I love listening to them. The ferns tell me a story whenever I see them.

O those ferns, that grow so high and tall about the dear old home! I remember them when the green waving fronds were higher than my head; I remember them later, when my head was a little higher up in the world, and I had grown above the ferns, but never above the fairy tales they told, or the fancies that flitted in and out amongst them, while the summer wind swept over the green mass and put it in motion like sea waves.

There are few prettier sights than the stags with branching antlers standing knee-deep in fern, just

condescending to toss their heads if you pause to watch them for a moment. *They* don't care for you, not they! They only snuff the air contemptuously as you pass, and give you a haughty look out of their large full eyes. But step a little nearer—Ah! I thought as much! away they bound, crashing through the fern, never stopping until from beneath some spreading oak they stand still and turn to stare at the stranger just as contemptuously as before, even after that ignominious flight, trying to look as if they did not know what fear was. However, though deer are timid creatures as a rule, yet it does not do to go too near those splendid fellows in the autumn, when they are quarrelsome, and often dangerous. If you were to come suddenly upon two of them engaged in a desperate fight, they would be very apt to forget they were angry with each other, and join together in attacking *you*, which would hardly be pleasant, for those fine branching antlers are not only handsome ornaments, but very formidable weapons as well. One October, when the fierce clash of horns resounded often round the old house, an adventure

befell some stags I know. I had known them all my life—well, perhaps, not the *same* stags, for deer, like human beings, grow old and die, and others grow up in their places; but the pretty dappled hides are so much alike, and the deer do look so *very* like the deer of my childhood, that it is easy to fancy them the same. One October afternoon, then, when the report of a gun was heard now and then in the woods, and the fern was turning brown, and painted leaves beginning to fall from the trees in the park, it was noticed that the whole herd were flying before one stag; he appeared to be hunting them up and down for his own private amusement. But was it a stag at all, or some queer monster? Some strange unearthly creature, a fern giant, a demon of the brake! Backwards and forwards he chased the flying deer, never coming up with them, for the faster he pursued, the faster they fled before him. Field-glasses revealed the mystery, and reduced the horrid spectre to a stag again, for through them it was discovered that a perfect stack of fern had become entangled in the poor beast's antlers.

And you have no idea how odd it made him look! A sort of phantom stag, such as might be supposed to haunt the dreams of the gamekeeper who shoots a fat buck, or the master who has dined on venison. Poor fellow! the novel headdress alarmed him so terribly, that he wished to hide among the herd; but they were, every one of them, frightened out of their wits at his extraordinary appearance, and would by no means allow him to come near them. It ended at last in one bolder than the rest summoning courage to turn and fight him. In the combat the fern gradually disappeared, and as soon as he looked once more like a reasonable deer, he was admitted quietly enough amongst his fellows.

It was not at all surprising that the deer should be so terrified by their companion's strange looks; they always are dreadfully frightened at anything they do not understand. I have often wondered why they did not leap over, or break through, the simple barrier of a piece of twine, with here and there a white feather attached to it, which was put across the corner of the park in which the keeper wished to confine them, but they wouldn't have

passed it for the world. "What is it?" they asked each other, "those horrible white things! how they move and stir, and bob up and down! what can it be?" and not the wisest doe or most sagacious stag in the herd would venture near the mysterious line. And all the time what was it crossing the park, and coming close to them on the other side? Oh, *that!* they knew what that was well enough—were not afraid of it at all—only the old farm cart. Pernaps if those dreadful feathers had not stood in the way, they might have gone a little farther off; but pass *them* in order to get further from a cart! it was not to be thought of. So they stayed where they were, little thinking that, lying down in the cart so as to be completely hidden, with only just the muzzle of his gun appearing in front, was the keeper intent upon singling out the fattest buck amongst them! The end of it was, that by-and-by a smoking haunch of venison appeared upon the table at the big house, and there was one pretty dappled hide the less in the green park glades.

But I am forgetting the fern's story; here it is:—

The lesson-books were open on the table, and Sue and I were giving one last look at the sums and exercises, which we had prepared that morning to show to mamma in the afternoon, when—whizz! came a boy's straw hat in at the open window, lighted on Susie's copy-book, and nearly upset the inkstand; almost at the same moment the boy's head to which the hat belonged popped in upon us. It was Roger.

"Shut up your books, girls!" he cried, "Aunt Lydia has sent for mamma in no end of a hurry, and papa is to drive her over."

"That's what I call considerate," shouted Ned as he too came running up; "that's doing as she would be done by on a fine afternoon like this."

"If only auntie is not ill or anything," said gentle Sue, as she picked up Roger's hat, and handed it back to him; "was there anything the matter at Yellowfields, did you hear?"

"The matter? no, indeed," answered Roger, "the message was—all was well, but would mamma come over at once if she was not particularly engaged; and I raced to tell you girls directly—

that is, I only just stopped to see the pony put to."

How much obliged we were to Aunt Lydia! We ran at once to the front door, but only reached it in time to see mamma step into the pony carriage. She kissed her hand to us, and called out that we might "do just what we liked, and enjoy the unexpected half-holiday as much as we could," and then her voice was lost in the sound of the wheels upon the gravel, and in another moment the little carriage had disappeared behind the laurels in the shrubbery drive.

What an afternoon it was! glowing sunshine everywhere, and just a sweet fresh wind at play among the flowers, so that it was not *too* hot, and, best of all, the golden hours were our own to employ as we liked. Sue and I began to consult *how* we should employ them. There was generally some craze or other on hand amongst us, some pet pursuit to which we were very apt to make everything else give way, and just now it happened to be ferns. We were wild about them; hunting for choice specimens whenever we could get away to the

woods ; planting, watering, and otherwise messing over them at all spare moments. I decided at once that we would go fern-hunting. The boys had brought home a report that certain specimens which we were very anxious to possess grew in a wood about two miles off, and as hitherto we had failed to find them nearer home, we had been eagerly longing for an opportunity of going there ; but it was too far for our usual afternoon walk, and the expedition had been fixed for the next Saturday, a day when we always had plenty of time to ourselves. Now, however, we were unexpectedly set free from lessons, and the boys agreed that the chance must not be lost. We were in high glee ; the barrow was fetched from the tool-house, Ned carried the spade, Roger politely promised to wheel Susie and myself, in turns, if we should grow tired, the dogs were loosed, and all was ready for a start, when suddenly Sue stopped short, and exclaimed in tragic tones,

“ Old Nannie ! ”

“ What about her ? ” asked Roger ; “ you don’t mean to say you’ve got to go there.”

Susie nodded her head gravely. Nannie was a poor bed-ridden woman to whom mamma had promised a few comforts, which she had desired us to take to her that very afternoon.

"But that was to have been our regular walk," I objected; "it is all changed now: mamma said we were to do *what we liked*; she meant us to enjoy ourselves and be happy."

Sue thought mamma only intended to make us a present of our time *after* the walk to Nannie's cottage, and was quite sure it would be wrong to disappoint the old woman. The errand would not take up all the afternoon, there would still be time to spare.

That was true, but there would not be nearly time enough for the expedition to the wood, and I was determined to be happy in my own way. The boys offered to go for the ferns by themselves, but I knew better than to trust to their bringing anything home, although they were capital at making discoveries; I insisted upon going with them, and tried hard to persuade Sue to come too. She smiled, and shook her head.

"I can go alone—yes, Gracie, I like it, at least I don't mind it much. It won't matter who takes the things, so long as Nannie gets them ; it will be all right, we can each please ourselves in our own way," yet she looked at me a little wistfully as we separated : she had been more eager than I was even, about the ferns, until she remembered that duty stood in the way of pleasure.

Sue was the quietest of us all ; it was odd we should find it so hard to do without her, and that we should miss her so much whenever she was not with us !

"What possessed her to remember old Nannie at all ?" exclaimed Ned impatiently, "it's a thousand pities !"

"*Nannie* won't think so," said Roger quietly ; and somehow or other the remark made me feel cross.

I don't know whether it was because I missed my sister, or because I felt uncomfortable at having allowed her to set out upon a lonely walk, or whether the boys really were a little provoking ; but certain it is we came very near quarrelling, and

the state of my temper was not improved by our finding no ferns at all worth bringing home, and not a sign of the particular one we were in search of. We hunted high and low, and as I grew hot and tired, I grew more cross, so that when the boys gave up the pursuit in despair, and it was proposed to me to forget the ferns for the present, and be the squaw of a Red Indian, I refused indignantly, and set off home by myself. In our wanderings we had reached the heart of the wood, and after I had parted from my brothers, it was so still that I had leisure to think quietly. As I pushed my way through the underwood, the shouts of Roger and Ned as they followed the "war-path," and scalped each other in the distance, grew more and more faint, at last I could not hear them at all, and then if I had chosen to listen, I might have heard a "still, small voice," which had been whispering to me all the afternoon. But I did *not* choose to listen to my conscience : true, I wondered why, instead of being particularly happy as I had intended to be, I felt so much the reverse, but I fancied it was because the day was too hot, or

because the boys were teasing—fancied anything and everything but the truth—namely, that I was uncomfortable because I had been pursuing that Will o' the Wisp, my own happiness. You know we never *can* come up with a Will o' the Wisp, and to set off on purpose to chase one is very likely to lead us into trouble. When I reached home, the afternoon I had determined to spend so pleasantly was nearly over ; all the golden hours gone, and what had I done with them ?

I found mamma returned from her drive, and seated on the terrace before the hall door.

“ Well, Gracie, have you enjoyed yourself ? ” she said ; “ and was Nannie very pleased to see you ? surely you did not forget her ! ” she added, seeing my hesitation.

How I wished I could say, I *had* “ forgotten ” her !

“ Sue went,” I began ; then answering my mother’s reproachful looks, for she did not speak, I hurried on, “ You know, mamma, you said ‘ do what you like,’ we thought we were to please ourselves.”

“ And you have been very happy, I suppose,

pleasing yourself, and leaving Susie to do my errand alone?"

I hung my head ashamed. At that moment the click of the shrubbery gate was heard, and Sue came in sight, her basket hanging on her arm. Sue was singing to herself as she walked slowly along beneath the trees, but when she caught sight of us upon the terrace, she began to run, and as she drew near I noticed that my sister's face was bright with smiles; as bright as though some of the sunshine of the sunny day lingered on it still.

"Poor Nannie was so very much obliged to you, mamma dear," she exclaimed, "and so glad to see me; and oh, Gracie! do you wonder I was gone so long? See here!"

Laughing merrily Sue raised the cover of her basket, and there in the space once occupied by Nannie's tea and sugar, lay two or three splendid specimens of the very fern we had in vain sought for elsewhere!

"Think of finding it in my path!" cried Sue, her eyes dancing with delight; "finding it when I wasn't even looking for it, you know! You can't

imagine how surprised I was," and off she ran to plant the precious roots without delay.

I stood silent by my mother's side. Sue had come home so bright and happy, I so dull and cross ; dimly I began at last to see the reason why I hardly ventured to raise my eyes to mamma's face when she spoke.

"Are you thinking, Grace, that Susie found something else for which she was not seeking, something besides the fern? It is easy to see which of my little girls has been the happiest this afternoon. One must not hope to find rare ferns in unexpected places every day, but *happiness* is a way-side plant ; we are pretty sure to find *that* springing up under our feet in the path of duty, while if we set out on purpose to seek it, we are more than likely never to find it at all."

This is the story the ferns tell me whenever I see them, whether growing on the gnarled roots of my friend's ferneries, or smiling at me from the hedges and banks as I pass along the road.

CHAPTER II.

THE COWSLIPS' STORY.

ONE afternoon lately I was paying a visit. It was a lovely spring day, and I would much rather have been out of doors than sitting in a hot drawing-room. I felt sure, moreover, that the lady we had come to see was exceedingly busy, and that we were interrupting her very much; but the friend at whose house in the country I was then staying, had insisted upon coming, for the unanswerable reason that it was now more than ten days since this lady had interrupted *us*, and she would begin to think us rude if we did not return her call.

We had done with the weather and had just begun upon the "rise in prices," and I was trying hard not only to look but to *feel* interested in the subject, when suddenly the room was full of music; the sweet clashing of golden bells was in my ears, and I saw a dear, dear old friend, nodding and

smiling to me from the top of an old cabinet filled with china ; I felt comforted directly.

A bunch of cowslips was there in a glass of water, and they began at once to whisper to me a tale of long ago. Their voices transported me far away from the hot drawing-room, and the tired, bored, civil ladies. I stood in rich grass, growing high, and bending as the wind swayed it to and fro ; I saw shining golden fields, and happy children playing in them ; I saw tall trees with tufts of yellow cowslips at their feet ; I felt the soft spring breeze kiss my cheeks; and I heard the merry ringing of the golden bells.

I wonder whether you thought "Yellowfields" a curious name for our Aunt Lydia's place when you saw it mentioned in the ferns' story? Most people did think it curious, but if they saw the place in spring, they said at once no other name would suit it half as well.

Little Susie named it. When first she came to live there, Aunt Lydia used really to get quite worried because she could not make up her mind what to call her new domain. Papa suggested

“the Hall” as it was the principal house in the village.

“But it’s *not* a hall,” insisted Aunt Lydia; “applied to a small house such as mine is, that would have a pretentious sound at once.”

“Call it ‘the Cottage,’ ” said mamma.

“But it’s not a cottage, Ellen,” exclaimed Aunt Lydia, turning round upon our mother, and speaking in the sharp quick decided tone that always frightened us children. “*I hope* it’s not a cottage,” and then she said something about “the pride that apes humility,” which Roger and I could not understand.

“It has always been known as ‘Uplands,’ ” said my father; but that wouldn’t do either.

My aunt instantly demanded, “Why ‘up’? tell me that, if you please; ‘lands’ I can understand—but ‘Uplands’ for acres of broad flat meadows! nonsense!”

“Lowlands then, or Flatlands,” half-whispered my mother, smiling from behind Susie’s golden curls, who sat on her knee, a little, fat, fair child of four years old; but *now* Aunt Lydia’s feelings were hurt.

"You are laughing at me, Ellen; if you are not interested in the subject we will change it, my dear."

Aunt Lydia was many years older than our mother, and Roger and I had been brought up in no little awe of her, though, as it happened, we had never seen her until she came to live in our neighbourhood. I was seven years old then, and Roger nearly eleven. Ned was Aunt Lydia's godson, and had sometimes been sent to visit her in London. I think his account of the quiet, regular, childless household helped to make us afraid of our aunt, but we outgrew that fear more and more every year, until at last we grew to love her dearly, and to look upon Yellowfields as a second home. But when first she came, we used to find her rather formidable. I remember well overhearing all the good advice she used to give mamma as to our bringing up. She thought we had too much liberty, and proposed a frightful code of laws for the school-room. Our mother listened to her elder sister with such pretty deference, that childlike we believed she fully

intended to obey her, and were as much surprised as relieved when we found that things went on just as usual, and that our parents continued to carry out their own views in the matter of our education. True, in some points we had to please our aunt. She insisted upon it that the girls should be made to curtsey, and the boys to bow, on entering and leaving a room, and mamma desired us to do so ; I am afraid we forgot it sometimes at home, and I don't think mamma herself always remembered it there ; but we soon learnt never to forget it at Yellowfields. Also, we were never allowed to kiss Aunt Lydia without leave, only to kiss her hand when we met her, or went to see her, and be content with that, unless she drew us to her for a warmer greeting. It was hard for Susie to remember this, but though she was only a baby, only four years old, she was even then a conscientious baby, and used to try hard not to forget. I think I see her now, bursting in at the drawing-room door full of some confidence to impart to mamma, of some little pleasure or some childish grief, and finding Aunt Lydia sitting with her.

"O Auntie Lil! Auntie Lil!" she would cry, and throw her arms round our aunt's neck, and hold up her dear little face for kisses. The kisses were always given, but in the midst of them Susie would draw back suddenly, run away to the door to make her forgotten curtsey, and then gravely walk up to Aunt Lydia and lift her hand to her lips. *She* never was afraid of her. She would perch herself confidingly upon her knee, and sit there singing her little low songs, not loud enough to interrupt; but if Aunt Lydia's voice grew querulous, up would come the tiny hand to stroke her cheek, or if Aunt Lydia laughed, Susie, without at all knowing what it was all about, laughed too. Even Ned, who knew his godmother so much better than the rest of us did, never ventured to speak in her presence unless spoken to, but Susie chatted away to her just as merrily as to every one else.

Sue was such a tiny child, that "last spring" was a long, long time ago to her, and spring flowers came like a surprise. How well I remember her delight at Aunt Lydia's meadows the first time she saw them! She was quite overpowered by the

sight of the buttercups. The fields were yellow with them; the wind tossed them to and fro. The golden ground seemed moving and swaying to the sound of the wind in the tree-tops; and look which way you would, there were more broad meadows, more yellow buttercups. Susie stretched out her arms in a sort of ecstasy of delight, for great tufts of cowslips were growing here and there.

"O bells, bells! gold bells in the yellow fields!" cried my little sister.

We made *such* cowslip-balls that day! Is there *anything* so sweet, so fresh, so exquisitely spring-like as a cowslip-ball? Don't you love to have one thrown so as to hit you softly on the cheek, and then to bury your face in it and kiss it before you toss it gently back again? I do. Yes, really; it is not a mistake; I did not mean to say I "*did*," but I do now: I have never outgrown cowslip-balls, and I'm sure I hope you will never outgrow them either.

We were sorry to be called away; but the pony-carriage was at the door, and it was a long five miles home. Roger and I squeezed into the little

back-seat as best we could. Ned was to be left with Aunt Lydia for a few days; and Susie was being lifted on to mamma's knee, when she turned to call out in her dear, little, ringing voice—

“Me'll come again so soon to yellow fields, Auntie Lil!”

“What!” said Aunt Lydia sharply, and setting the child down on her feet again instead of giving her to mamma; “Ellen, Susie has done it!”

“Dear, dear, I'm very sorry,” said poor mamma, always dreading that one or other of us were in mischief. “What is it she has done, Lydia?”

“Named the property,” answered Aunt Lydia solemnly; and turning with extended arms to point to her golden meadows, “‘Yellowfields’ it is, and ‘Yellowfields’ it shall be while *I* am mistress here.”

“Yes, *now*,” said papa; “but summer will come, then autumn, to say nothing of winter. You will have brown fields and white fields before the year is out.”

“No; I shall make my fortune by those meadows. When the buttercups are over, it will be

‘Yellowfields’ still, and still bear a golden crop. Susie has done it.”

Aunt Lydia kissed the little one, and placed her on her mother’s lap, and we drove away. Papa shrugged his shoulders, he did not believe in the “fortune;” and I never heard that Aunt Lydia’s farming *was* very successful; but the place was called Yellowfields from that day.

As I have said before, I was little more than seven years old at the time this name was given; but Aunt Lydia’s coming to live in our neighbourhood was an event that made a great impression on us, and I have a clear recollection, not only of the day Susie christened the property, but of the three days that followed. I remember looking back as we drove off, and seeing Ned come out into the road in order to keep the carriage in sight as long as possible and wave his hat to the last; and I remember the hunt we had next morning for cowslips in the fields near home. But there were none. Cowslips are not to be found everywhere, as the kind pale primroses are, and we envied Aunt Lydia the magnificent tufts which

grew in her meadows. I wanted to make cowslip-tea ; Susie pulled whole handfuls of primroses and daisies, only to throw them away again. "Me wants yellow *cells*," she kept saying ; but by-and-by forgot all about them and was content—or we thought so.

But the next morning, while she stood at mamma's knee trying to find great A and repeating her hymn, she began to talk about the "bells" again, and tried to explain, in her baby way, what it was she wanted. But mamma could not understand ; she called to Roger, who was flying his kite on the lawn outside, to "mind Susie, and find out what it was she meant ;" and tying on the little one's hat, she lifted her through the window. Now I always remember our eldest brother as the most kind and careful guardian of the younger ones ; but on looking back, on listening rather to the story my friends the cowslips ring out to me, I am led to the conclusion that it was the events of this particular day that made him so, and that, up to that time, he may have been as careless as boys between ten and eleven usually are.

As I have said he was flying his kite, and it did not suit him just then to have to attend to his little sister.

"But I'm going in the fields, mamma," he said in a very discontented tone.

"You are going to mind Susie, and be very careful of her," said mamma quietly; and Roger knew he must obey, but he spoke crossly to poor little Sue, and did not take particular pains to find out what was running in her head.

"It's only those bothering cowslips," he said, and by-and-by, as the child began to amuse herself with the daisies on the lawn, he returned to his kite. I had my lessons to do, and mamma was patiently assisting my blundering efforts to work a sum in simple addition, when we noticed how dark the room had become; the sky was suddenly overcast and rain was falling. I remember the rain, and the darkness, and a rattling peel of thunder very distinctly, because I was afraid not only of thunder, but of heavy rain as well. I suppose the sound it made dashing against the windows affected my nerves in some way; I know it always made

me miserable as a child, and I should be ashamed to say how old I was before I had outgrown my terror of sudden rain-storms! For your comfort, little folks, let me tell you I *did* outgrow it; and any foolish fears which make miserable the lives of nervous children, if only they struggle a little against them, will not last, they may be sure of that. Have a little patience, poor little mortals who quake at the dark, or tremble at a thunder-storm! it won't last for ever; you will grow wiser by-and-by, and look back upon such frights and wonder that you could mind them. I know this now, but I did not believe it when mamma told me so; and I thought then that I never should be able to bear the furious, rushing rain, or to watch the heavy dark clouds roll together, without shrinking and trembling.

“Seven and nine,” repeated mamma; “now, Grace, pay attention, seven and nine are sixteen.”

I wrote down a one and carried a six, and then let fall my pencil, and put my hands before my face, for the rattling thunder crashed again over-

head, and the sound of the driving rain almost drowned mamma's voice.

It was soon over, as storms in spring generally are, and I remember how pleased I felt when my mother said I had behaved better than usual, and how much I liked her assurance, though I could not half believe it, that the day would come when I should not be afraid of the rain. It had not occurred to her all this time to feel anxious about Susie, as she imagined her to be long ago safe at home; for the storm had not begun till past eleven o'clock, and Roger had been told to take her up to nurse before eleven, and that then he could amuse himself as he pleased. Susie was still baby enough to lie down in the middle of the day, although it was a delusion of nurse's that she ever went to sleep then, and I can recall now the strange look in mamma's face, when at twelve o'clock nurse came to ask for her. She did not speak at first, but she put her work down and rose hastily to look out of window. Everything was soaking wet, but the sun shone brilliantly, and the rain-drops sparkled on every leaf and blade of grass, the sky was very, very blue here

and there, and all full of white fleecy clouds. As mamma stood at the window, Roger ran across the lawn towards the house. He had evidently been out all through the storm, he had not a dry thread on him, and he looked scared, terrified ; mamma met him at the door, and I followed her, clinging to her gown.

“Susie ?” she said in a sharp, quick voice, very unlike her usual gentle tones.

“O mother, mother !” was all Roger’s answer as he stood still, and the water from his clothes dripped upon the floor.

“Was *she* out in all this wet ? it will be her death ; Roger, what *have* you done ? where is she ?”

Roger did not know ! As well as he could, he explained what had happened. Selfishly engrossed in his own pleasure he had taken little heed of the child ; she had come to him once shouting with joy, and saying she had found a “bell,” and begging him to get it for her. He followed to the iron paling which separated the garden from a field, in which was a stream of water sufficiently deep to

be dangerous for such a mite as Sue, and there on the other side of the stream there certainly *was* a solitary tuft of cowslips. Carelessly contenting himself with saying, "Susie mustn't go there," and promising to gather them for her by-and-by, he had returned to his kite, never thinking of her again until the first rain-drops fell, and then—he couldn't find her!

"And, O mother! the cowslips are gone!" sobbed poor Roger, breaking down altogether.

Through all the storm he had been searching for her, for though he feared she might have fallen into the stream, it was not deep enough to hide her had she done so, and his worst fear now was, that after gathering the "golden bells" she had wandered farther down, and fallen into the pond which lay still, and deep, and cold, under the willows at the bottom of the field.

"Did you distinctly tell her *not* to go into the field?" asked mamma in a dry hard voice.

Roger said, "Yes."

"Then she did not go," and my mother heaved a sigh of relief: "wherever else she went, poor little

darling, she did not go there ; Susie is scarcely more than a baby, but I can trust *her* ;" and then turning away from Roger altogether, my mother began to question me about the "bells" and Sue's longing for them. It struck her that the child had set off to go to Yellowfields, of course without having any idea of the distance or even of the way there.

Nurse, who was crying audibly, said something about "gipsies," and I saw the dawn of a new terror in my mother's face. She took down her garden hat from its peg and went out, desiring nurse to send for my father who was away somewhere about the home-farm, where he generally spent his mornings, and tell him Susie was missing. I and Roger were left alone for a few minutes. I remember how he stood staring after mamma for a moment, and then flung himself face downwards on the floor, and the despairing feeling that came over me when I saw him do so. I put my hand on his wet jacket, and he kicked at me, crying out,

"Get away, Grace ! leave me alone, I tell you !"

and then nurse came back, and hustled him upstairs to change his clothes, scolding him all the time, and saying all mamma had *not* said of his "wicked carelessness to go and leave that dear babe to herself," and how she "hoped and prayed no harm might come to her ; but if he never looked upon her blessed little face again, it would be no more than he deserved."

No wonder I remember that day so distinctly, for a most miserable day it was. Nurse insisted upon Roger going to bed and taking a hot drink. I was left alone. Mamma did not come back, and I wandered aimlessly about between house and garden, and at last sat curled up in the hall window to watch for her return. It seemed as if every one had forgotten me, for it was long past dinner-time and no one had been near me. I leaned my head against the window and began to cry, as much I now fancy from hunger as from grief, and there Mrs Parsons, the housekeeper, found me and carried me off at once to her own domains.

"If one little lady's lost, t'other one is only the more precious," she said ; "I don't see any sense in

neglecting them as are left ; " and she sent at once to see if nurse had forgotten Roger too, or whether any dinner had been sent up to him. Roast chicken was decidedly comforting, and I listened to Mrs Parsons' assurances that Sue would be sleeping safely in her little white bed at night, till I began to think that after all there was nothing to be miserable about, and forgot my troubles over a game of play with the old housekeeper's room cat and her family of kittens. But when Mrs Parsons was called away, and I was alone again, I began to wonder where Roger was, and to feel quite strange and uncomfortable downstairs by myself. I went up intending to find him, but as I crossed the hall there came a strange sound through the open drawing-room door that made me stand still to listen. Some one was crying. I crept trembling to the doorway and peeped in. Mamma was lying on the sofa, hiding her face amongst the pillows and sobbing bitterly. Papa knelt beside her. I cannot describe the feeling of dismay that came over me! *Mamma* crying! I never remembered to have seen such a thing before; I don't believe

I had ever imagined such a thing was possible. I ran straight upstairs to Roger's room and burst into it, exclaiming—

“O Roger! what do you think?”

Roger sat up in bed and cried out in such a loud voice that he startled me—

“Found!”

“What?” I asked stupidly enough.

“Is she found? Grace, don't be a donkey! Speak, can't you; is Sue come home?”

“I don't know; but what *do* you think, Roger? Mamma is *crying!*” and I burst into tears myself.

Roger threw himself down again, and bade me “get out of his room at once;” and not daring to disobey, I went and sat on the top step of the last flight of stairs, where I could see what went on in the hall.

By-and-by papa came out of the drawing-room and left the house, but I still sat there trying to stifle my sobs until I saw mamma standing at the foot of the stairs. She had ceased crying, and her voice was as gentle and sweet as it always sounded to us.

“Gracie!” she called, and held out her arms to me. I flew downstairs and threw myself into them. Mamma took me with her to the drawing-room, and held me on her lap, great girl though I was, and talked to me till I felt comforted—more comforted than I had felt by all Mrs Parsons’ assurances of Susie’s safety; for we did not *know* where she was, we could not be *sure* that she would be home before night, and mamma talked of what we *did* “know,” of what we *were* “sure” of. She talked of the loving Father in Heaven, out of whose sight little Sue *could* not wander, and of the protecting Almighty arm which would *certainly* keep her safe whether *we* ever saw her again or no, and listening to all this my sobs ceased and I fell asleep.

I think mamma must have laid me on the sofa, for it was there I found myself when I woke, but I slept a long time first; it had been somewhere about three o’clock when her voice had seemed to me to grow faint and far off and then to cease altogether, and it was nearly five when I slowly opened my eyes. My waking thoughts were confused. I had

been dreaming of cowslips, and it seemed as if the dream was not over, for the sweet, fresh smell of cowslips was the first thing that struck me, and then the soft velvety touch of the flowers upon my cheek. A cowslip ball was lying just on my shoulder. I took hold of it and felt a little as if I did not want to wake to real life. Sue was lost, and cowslips grew in dreamland. I turned my head to speak to mamma, but she was not in the room. On a low stool by my side, her lap full of the "golden bells," and in her hand a great yellow ball, which she was softly tossing up into the air and catching as it fell, sat little Susie herself!

"Me didn't wake you!" she cried when she saw my wide open eyes; "me was a quiet mouse, and watched you," and she put her little face up for a kiss.

Mamma came back just at that moment. How smiling and happy she looked, and how she kissed and fondled us both. Do you wonder that I recollect that day, or that I like so much to listen to the stories cowslips tell?

By-and-by I heard how papa had found her,

Riding home, weary and heart-broken, he passed a lonely cottage in a deep narrow lane, not two miles from our house, but in a direction that we never walked. The land thereabouts was not his, his property lying all towards Yellowfields, and he did not know who lived in the little cottage. Stopping with the intention of repeating once again the questions he had asked of all he met or passed that day—"Had a little girl been seen?" "Had the gipsies passed that way?"—judge of his surprise, when a child in a lilac print frock ran to the door and called out joyfully—

"Papa! papa! me want to go home!"

In spite of the lilac cotton, it was Susie sure enough, and Mrs Burke came smiling and civil-spoken to explain.

She said that in the midst of the storm that morning she had seen the little one running past her door, and crying as she went. At four years old it is hard to explain things very clearly, and Mrs Burke, being a new comer and a stranger, could not at all make out Susie's account of herself. However, she took her in, stripped off her dripping clothes,

and dressed her in clean dry clothes of her own little daughter's. She intended to send her husband to find out who the child was and take her home, but did not expect to see him before the evening. Meantime, a promise to Sue that she should "go home to mamma after tea," kept her quite content, and she enjoyed her dinner of bread and cheese and a slice of "plum loaf." After dinner, Mrs Burke's children took her to play in a meadow behind the house, and oh, joy of joys! the meadow was *full* of cowslips! Sue had certainly found "golden bells" enough at last. It was not till the next day that we heard how it was Susie had left the garden at all. It seems that Jane Byng, the lodgekeeper's daughter, a great girl of twelve years old, whom Susie knew well, had passed on her way to the next village, where she was to spend the night with her grandmother, and seeing the little girl looking dull and lonely as she stood at the gate, had stopped to speak to her. Cowslips were at the bottom of all the mischief. Jane had cowslips in her hand, and finding how anxious Sue was to have some, had taken her

with her down the lane, where she was sure she had seen some the day before. She may have seen them the day before, but none were to be seen now, and the search tempted the girl on further than she had any idea of, until at last becoming aware of how fast the clouds were gathering, and not daring to go back herself, as she was already far too late, Jane had bid little Susie run home alone. She watched her as long as she could keep her in sight, and then set off in the opposite direction. We suppose Sue must have lost her way after that, for certainly Mrs Burke's cottage was not in her road home, but of her frightened run through the storm nothing could be learnt except from the poor little body herself, and mamma would not have her confused by questions. We never knew who gathered the cowslips on the bank of our stream ; but one thing was certain, Susie did not do so. Mamma was right ; she had not been into the field at all. Mrs Byng sent Jane up to explain, and ask pardon for her share in the day's misfortunes, and I remember seeing her stand crying in the hall while papa spoke to her. I don't know what Jane thought of

her scolding, but I ran away quite frightened at the sound of his stern voice !

No one said much to Roger about his selfishness, which had led to all this trouble. I should think we had fewer lectures read us than any children in England, and that fewer morals were pointed in our nursery than in any nursery in the world. *This* moral had a point that needed no sharpening ; Roger felt it deeply.

"I'll take *such* care of her," he said, as we all went out next morning.

"I'm sure you will, dear," said mamma.

"I'll *never* lose sight of her again"—

"Oh, as to that, I am not anxious ; I put more trust in my little Susie's promises than in your protection of her. I have forbidden her to leave the garden."

Roger let fall the little hand he held, and ran across the room to mamma, throwing himself down by her, and hiding his eyes in her lap.

Oh, trust me, mamma! *do*, DO trust me!" he cried.

Mamma kissed him, and stroked his head and held him to her, but all she *said* was—

“You must *earn again*, Roger, the trust in you that I have lost. It will be a work of time—a long time, perhaps ; but I can’t help that, my poor little boy, it is not my fault.”

Of course we all found our way to Mrs Burke’s cowslip meadow, as the spring days went by. We made balls, we made garlands, we made *quantities* of cowslip-tea—it was so nasty, but we drank it out of dolls cups, and tried to think it delicious ; and whenever I see them now, the cowslips tell me such sweet stories of bright spring days and golden bells and little Sue, and of the good, unselfish, careful elder brother, that in my remembrance of him all through our childhood, Roger grew to be.

CHAPTER III.

*NAUGHTY TINY'S TRIP TO AMERICA.**

IT did not happen to us, but to a little friend of ours; and I remember, though we were all very small children at the time, that it made a great impression. It is a bath-chair story; but there must be a lady in the bath-chair, and a little girl walking somewhere near, and if she wanders away now and then and looks as if she did not belong to the lady, and afterwards runs back and looks as if she *did*—why, the story is all the plainer.

Tiny had set her heart upon going to America. Not that she knew where it was, or even *what* it was; for she had not yet lived five years in the world, and one does not learn much of anything in only five years—certainly not much of geography;

* This story, with three others, "A Plumcake Story," "My Hardships at Sea," and "Our Half-holiday," made their first appearance in "Little Folks."

still she had fully made up her mind to go to America. Her elder brothers and sisters had been there—she had heard them say so—and they always seemed to come back safe at night; so of course it could not be very far off. They generally went on a half-holiday (for these children were very fond of playing at running away from home, and pretending to meet with all kinds of adventures). But as for Tiny, *she* was not in play, or rather “play,” while it lasts, is “earnest” at four and a half. She would have told you, if you had asked her, that she was “really and truly going to America.” As it happened, however, no one did ask her, she kept her own secret, and watched for an opportunity.

Her first attempt resulted in failure; but that was owing to an apple-stall. One morning, dressed before the other nursery children, and tripping downstairs by herself, she found the hall-door open, and recognised at once the golden opportunity so long coveted. She seized it instantly, and set off fearless. Once in the street, the little feet pattered fast along the pavement; and who knows what

would have been the end of the adventure, but for the apple-stall at the corner! Clearly, it was desirable to provide one's self with some refreshments to be eaten upon the journey; and were there not certain pennies in a little box of treasures at home? The door was open—the nurses still busy. Back again then at full speed without the loss of a moment, in at the door—which, strange to say, really was as she had left it—up the long flight of stairs to the very top of the tall London house, even down again unnoticed and successful with pennies clutched tightly in a little hot hand, on the high road to liberty and America. But by this time cook, with her pail and scrubbing-brush, had returned to the white steps, which she had only left for a few moments, and the little maid was captive! Tiny was sorry she had turned back, and resolved to go without apples next time she had a chance to go at all. The chance came before long.

These children walked every day in Marylebone Gardens, and one afternoon, when there was no one but themselves and their nurse in one

of the broad walks with great iron gates opening on to the street, Tiny suddenly thought she would try again. What put it into her head was a mischievous trick of her little brother, who was a year older than herself. Poor nurse had trusted him with the key to open the gate, and he and Tiny raced on before to do so, while she followed slowly with baby in her arms and another little one toddling by her side. When the heavy gate was open, the naughty boy pulled Tiny through it into the street, and, shutting it after them, left nurse a safe prisoner until she could find some person in the gardens to let her out. I have said there was no one in the broad walk at that moment; but there were plenty of nurses and children in other walks and in the shady arbours.

Finding herself free, Tiny instantly suggested that they should go to America. He knew a little more than she did, still he did not know much.

"I don't care if we do," he said. "We shall have to go in a ship, you know. I like ships."

"I don't," said Tiny; "I like cabs best. I mean to go to America in a cab."

Her brother agreed that it might perhaps be more comfortable—at all events there *was* the cab at other side of the street, and they did not exactly know where to find a ship ; so they crossed over, and ran as fast as they could towards it.

The cabman stared as the breathless children came up to him, and Tiny signed to him to open the door. As soon as he did so, they both scrambled in in hot haste.

“Where to, little miss ?” asked the driver.

“To America, please,” said Tiny.

And then there was a long pause. Perhaps the cabman was calculating the fare ! They thought it likely, and began to wonder how they should pay him—at least the little boy did, the little girl only wondered when they would start. And by-and-by they did start. The man called out “All right !” and nodded his head, but somehow he did not seem to be saying it to the children or to be nodding his head to *them*. However, he mounted to the box, took up the reins, and turned the horse’s head round. Tiny’s legs were very short, and her feet, when she was sitting in the cab, were

a great way from the bottom of it, so that the first jolt tumbled her off the seat altogether, and as she picked herself up, the cab stopped. She thought the journey remarkably short ; and so it was, for the cabman had not taken them to America at all, but only to the garden-gate, which was now open, and nurse stood there very cross indeed. The driver tried to tease the children by demanding payment for the distance he had brought them, but nurse would not let them answer him ; she only said "Thank you," and then made the two runaways walk home hand-in-hand before her. They set off with very red faces, because the cabman was laughing loudly and calling out after them—

"You hadn't ought to call a public conveyance as you don't mean to pay for, young master and miss ! "

In the evening Tiny sat on her elder sister's knee, and heard a great deal about America ; how far off it was, and of the wonderful ocean that lay between us and it, and her brother had a task given him to learn, because he had been so naughty as

to run away from nurse. The task was this sentence out of the geography book—"an island is a piece of land entirely surrounded by water." He said it over so often, that Tiny learnt it too, and then she understood that as England is an island she could not get to America in a cab. But I am sorry to say that even after this Tiny ran away again.

The two nurses and all the children were in Kensington Gardens listening to the band, and poor Tiny was not feeling quite good that day. She wanted very much to vex nurse ; as it happened she succeeded, but then she vexed herself also very much in the end, which she had not wanted to do at all. She thought she would hide, and let the others go home without her. If she did not know the way to America, she knew the way to Chester Square very well. But she had to wait until the nurses' eyes were off her.

Presently one of them said to the other,

"Now that's what I call tasty, the blue bonnet with the rose."

"So it is," answered the under-nurse, and while

they looked at the tasty bonnet, Tiny made her escape.

Oh, what the poor nurses went through in the next four hours! and oh, what Tiny's papa and mamma went through! for they thought their little girl was lost.

Naughty Tiny found it easy enough to hide amongst all the crowd of people who were out that fine day, and she went as fast as she could, right away into Hyde Park, where for some time she really did find it very amusing to walk about by herself. She felt so grand, and independent, and grown up. Once a policeman looked at her very hard, she did not quite like that, so as there happened just then to be a lady in a bath-chair close to her, Miss Tiny walked behind the chair, and then of course the policeman thought she belonged to the lady who was in it, and he took no more notice of her. I can't tell you all the little girl did during the long four hours, when the nurses were half out of their wits with fright, and her poor papa and mamma nearly broken-hearted about her, for no one had any account of her adventures, except

the one the little girl herself was able to give ; but it is certain that when at last she took it into her head to go home, she began to grow very frightened at what they would do and say when they saw her, and every step she took towards Chester Square she grew more frightened still, for she knew how naughty she had been, and how much she deserved to be punished. Nurse used always to tell the children when they were troublesome, that mamma would not love them if they were not good ; and poor Tiny felt she was so bad a child, that of course mamma could not love her, and if the love was all gone, why, no doubt, neither papa nor mamma would mind how terrible the punishment was.

When she got to the house she met with the only real difficulty she had as yet had to encounter ; she was so small she could neither reach the bell, nor the knocker ! and while poor Tiny was standing on tip-toe, and struggling to grasp the bell-handle with the little bits of fingers at the end of her short fat arm, the door suddenly opened, and she tumbled head foremost into the hall. Some one picked

her up. It was her papa. He held her very tight in his arms, and Tiny felt more frightened than ever. What *would* he do to her? She expected every instant to be set down on her feet, and have her ears boxed as nurse sometimes used to do, when, as the much-tried woman said, "missie was quite past bearing."

I can't tell you how surprised Tiny was when her papa did nothing at all of that kind, but only pressed her closer and closer to him, and covered her face with kisses! Then he carried her into the drawing-room, and put her on her mamma's lap, and her mamma kissed her again and again, but she, like papa, could hardly say a word, she was so very, very glad to have her little girl safe in her arms.

Then when Tiny had ceased to be frightened she began to be *sorry*—oh, so sorry, for having grieved her dear father and mother; she cried very much, and promised she would never, never do such a thing again.

Of course she *was* punished in the end. Her mamma said she could not trust her now, and when

she went out she had a chain on, just like a little dog!—by which nurse led her along. The chain was only a long piece of blue ribbon, to be sure; but think how uncomfortable for Tiny, and how ashamed she felt when she met any one she knew! We often met her after they came back to the country, for they lived near us, and I assure you we felt for her very much indeed, and thought it a most dreadful state of things. She had vexed nurse for one day, but the vexation for herself lasted many days; it was more than a month before she was allowed to go out walking without that horrid blue ribbon. When we passed, she would try to hide it by keeping close to her nurse's side, and, of course, we politely pretended that we saw nothing exceptional; but I well remember the relief it was when she came running to meet us one day, and we knew by that, that the chain was gone.

And yet after this, whenever nurse said, "Miss Tiny, mamma won't love you if you are not good," Tiny used to answer, "But she *will*! she'll punish me when I'm naughty, but she'll *always* love

me ; " she understood now that her mother punished her just *because* she loved her.

I wonder what would become of a good many people older than Tiny, if there was only love for those who were *quite good*, and none at all for the naughty ones !

CHAPTER IV.

SPOTTED COTTONS.

WHAT! you don't admire the patchwork quilt on my bed? You wonder I can keep such an ugly old thing; it looks just like Widow Barnes' in the village, does it? You wish I would turn it away, and let you knit me one of those "splendacious" (isn't that a nice word?) affairs of scarlet and white wool in stripes. Thank you. Very warm, no doubt; very handsome, certainly. But there, my dear! knit it for Widow Barnes—she'll lie warm under it; only leave me my faded quilt, for what should I do without it to tell stories to me as I lie in bed with a cold or a headache?

"What sort of stories does it tell," do you ask?

Oh, so many! See this fine merino pattern—light blue—well, yes, I know, it is *very* light now, the quilt has been washed so often—but once it was *such a bleu de ciel*, and Sue and I were so

proud of the dancing-frocks made of it! Our first dancing-frocks they were. I can't look at it now without feeling an inclination to hold out my dress, turn out my toes, and "bend and rise." Poor Miss Willow, our dancing-mistress; how often and how touchingly did she entreat us to "*bend!*" The words were for ever on her lips—"Now bend, young ladies, bend." I only wonder we were not all bent double; and such an example as she set us! how she *did* "bend" herself—slow, steady, and graceful, all the time, while we tottered, and trembled, and were unsteady on our legs (our lower limbs, Miss Willow called them), and behaved very much like young calves staggering under their own weight. If Miss Willow had ceased to attend to us for a moment, and was having a little talk with one or other of the mammas who generally came to look on at the lesson, in the act of turning to us again, and before she even looked to see what stage of the proceedings in quadrille or lancers we had arrived at, the words were heard, "Now *bend*, dears, *bend*." She knew only too well that the words were necessary, that whatever else we might be doing, we

were not "bending." But this was long after the days of "spotted cottons."

There are a good many Sunday stories in this quilt.

If my eyes fall upon the piece of pink cambric in the corner, it begins at once to speak to me of hot summer Sundays, and of Sue and me walking hand-in-hand along the path to church. We wore bonnets of "bird's-eye straw" with those frocks. The straw pricked us; there were enormous bows of pink figured-satin ribbon on one side of the bonnets, which were so large that we could not see each other when we held our heads quite straight. We only wore them on Sundays, and nurse thought them beautiful, but I remember we used to be very glad when they went back into the band-box. There are bits of the old rector's sermons all over my quilt. That brown piece was another Sunday frock. How often have I stared at Sue sitting opposite, and tried to count the white spots on the brown ground to keep myself awake, while the rector was talking about "silver wings covered with gold" or "the fat of rams." Those words

and some others are familiar to my quilt, because they were so frequently repeated. I don't think our clergyman had many sermons—we used to hear the same over and over again. It seems to me that we always heard about "the fat of rams" when we wore the brown frocks. Sue was more attentive in church than I was. Her place was in the corner of the square green baize-lined pew, between mamma and Roger, and she used to stare straight up into the rector's face during the sermon, just as if she understood it all, which I am sure she didn't, for she never knew anything about it afterwards.

"Why do you listen?" I asked her one day.

"Oh, I don't know—I like church," said little Sue.

There *were* sermons we both liked to listen to. The rector nearly always dined with papa and mamma on Sundays, and after dinner he preached to us children all to ourselves. It was at dessert; almonds and raisins, or, in summer, strawberries and cherries, sweetened the discourse. We were supposed to tell him if we had been naughty during

the week, or in any kind of trouble, but he liked hearing other things best.

“Dear, dear!” I remember his saying one evening, “don’t tell me of nothing but trouble! What *pleasures* have you had this week? Didn’t I hear of two little girls going over to the market town in the donkey-cart? Haven’t you all been well and strong and happy?”

“Oh, yes!” we cried joyfully, and told him all we had done; how Roger and Ned had played cricket, and their side had beat; how Sue’s new doll had come from London, and my old one had been grandly buried under the walnut-tree; how lessons had gone on so well; and really, now we came to think of it, there had been no trouble in the school-room at all.

“No quarrels?”

We laughed; he *knew* we never quarrelled.

“You love each other, and are well, and try to be good children?”

“Yes.”

“And papa and mamma care for you?”

I nodded, Sue laid her cheek against mamma’s,

Roger and Ned looked at each other smiling—I think they understood what was meant.

“Then, my little ones, let us praise God,” said our good old friend; and the brown merino still repeats, just as often as I choose to listen to it, the short sermon that followed. I distinctly remember hearing the rector say, as he was taking leave of my father that evening—

“For pity’s sake, don’t let the children grow up with the idea that religion has only to do with their *sins*!”

I did not listen to the rest of his remarks, for Ned was glow-worm hunting on the lawn, and Sue and I anxiously watching his proceedings from the gravel walk (the dew had fallen, and we were told to keep off the grass); but I have often thought since of our good rector and our wise parents, when I have seen how closely children sometimes connect thoughts of their Bibles, or “Sunday talks,” with “being naughty,” and how far apart the thought of religion seems from the *joys* and *pleasures* of their lives.

This handsome border to my quilt is made of

pieces of our spotted cottons. I pity little girls who have no spotted cottons! Ours covered us up to our chins, and down below the skirts of our best frocks, and they had long sleeves that buttoned at the wrist. We might go anywhere, and do anything in them, and if we were wanted in the drawing-room, we had only to take them off, and there we were in neat print frocks, as "nice as ninepence," as nurse used to say. I once got into trouble about my spotted cotton. We had a great many of them, generally four or five apiece, but one unlucky week I had not enough; I had dirtied them all out but one, and nurse decreed that that one must be kept for the school-feast, and that I must for two whole days undergo the penance of wearing my little blue merino frock on my mind, as well as my body, as I called it; that is, I must think of it, and take care of it. The feast was at Easter, and Easter fell early that year; the spring winds were cold, and we had not yet begun our summer print dresses, or my penance would not have been so irksome, for print will wash, and if an accident did happen, it would not be irremediable.

“Mud pies! no, Miss. I wonder at you, *I do*,” nurse said sternly, “what do you suppose would become of your frock? I might as well speak to the winds, I might; there, my dear! it won’t be for long: once the feast is over, you can get to your play again, and make as many mud pies, and puddings too, as you like.”

“The clay will be gone then,” said I, “and it’s lovely, and there’s an old pail the men are not using, and we could mix in it, you know. The *men* will be gone in two days.”

Some repairs were being executed in the stables, and there certainly *was* a very fascinating heap of clay in the yard. We used to watch the men mix it with water, and make balls and lumps of it, though what they did it for, I did not know then, and cannot imagine now.

“Couldn’t I have a night-gown?” I asked.

“A night-gown, Miss Grace? pray, what for?”

“To wear over my merino while I mess.”

“*To wear over your merino while you mess!*”

Nurse’s indignation was great: I felt it would be

best to drop the subject, but it was hard, and I stood sadly looking out of a little side window in the night nursery, from which the stable-yard was visible, and now and then catching sight of an end of Susie's spotted cotton, as she ran across, or stooped down, armed with an old kitchen spoon, the very best tool in the world for mud-pie making. I knew the child wouldn't be happy for long without me, and presently she came in to see why I did not join her. Nothing would do but that I must try on one of her cottons. Of course it was of no use, and trying to get into it crumpled up my merino so badly that I was afraid nurse would scold. Little Sue would not go to her play by herself, so we took a quiet walk, and next day it rained hard, from morning to night, and we were a good deal in the drawing-room with mamma. The merino was safe enough there, and mamma pitied me very much for having to take care of it, and said she thought nurse must have managed badly to leave me with only one cotton. Her saying this was a great comfort, but then she did not know all the poor cottons had gone through that week. On

Monday we had watered our plantation and painted the walls of our arbour. You may imagine the mess we made, although the "plantation," of oak trees about four inches high (we had planted the acorns ourselves), was not much more than a yard square, and the "walls" of the arbour were two upright planks, just a wee bit higher than Susie was tall. We painted them in water colour, and it took so much colour, that we melted down the cake of Prussian blue in my paint box, and mixed it with gum and water in an old jam pot, and then "laid it on" with a nice little bannister brush, which we stole from the house-maid's box in the corner cupboard under the stairs. We put it back again, but I think she must have been surprised at its appearance when she next saw it, for besides the blue colour, it was all stiff with gum. The gum was a bright idea, though; it made the mixture *just* as good as oil paint. We did not go to the arbour for some days after we had finished it, and then it certainly showed very little signs of ever having been painted at all; but that was not *our* fault, you know: it was owing to the rain, and the

best of house-painters and decorators cannot command the weather.

Well, we had *two* cottons that day, and Sue kept hers pretty clean, and wore it all Tuesday but I had a misfortune at tea-time. I was teaching Susie how to turn out a pot of jam without letting it break, as I had seen Mrs Parsons do for the glass dishes on the dining-room breakfast table. It *did* turn out beautifully, only into my lap instead of the plate, and in my dread of nurse's displeasure, I tried to pop it back in the pot with my hands, and my cotton was in a dreadful state, and had to be changed again at once.

"That's *three* already, Miss Grace," nurse said severely, as she tied the tape at the throat, and buttoned the waistband. "If you don't take care, you'll get into trouble."

The threat subdued me: "trouble" meant the large light cupboard opening from the nursery; it had a horrid little button on the door, which nurse had authority to turn upon a captive in any case of wilful misbehaviour. I wore that cotton all Tuesday, and then only spoilt it on Wednesday by

a *real* accident, which happened at lesson-time, and which mamma herself said was not *quite* my fault. Something possessed the ink-bottle to upset itself all over me ; and I really was doing my best to be steady, mamma said so herself, and sent a message to nurse to say I was not to be scolded. We went out with her that afternoon, and I wanted no more cottons till Thursday morning, and then, alas ! there was only one left, and that, as I have said, must be kept for the feast on Saturday.

“Now, Miss,” said nurse on Saturday morning, “you can have an easy mind at last. And I will say you deserve to be happy to-day, for there’s not a spot on your merino, and that’s wonderful, considering the jam and the ink and all it’s gone through, and you for two days with no cotton at all to protect it. *Snap* went the tape just as she was in the act of tying it. Another must be run in. I stamped with vexation.

“You did that on purpose !”

“Miss !”

I burst out crying, but nurse threw open the cupboard door, and I thought better of it and stopped.

"In five minutes, Miss Grace, I will run in another string."

Nurse meant to make me wait those five minutes by way of punishment for my impatience, but she was called away before they were over, and I slipped downstairs to see what kind of a day it was.

It was a lovely day. Sue stood at the open hall door, and a soft spring wind was blowing her curls about. The sun was shining brightly, green leaves were unfolding themselves upon the beeches, and it was a whole holiday, and a school-feast day, and altogether there was enough to put any little girl in high spirits.

"Let's have a race, Susie."

"But your cotton."

"Nonsense, child!" I liked calling Susie "child," it made me feel quite the three years older that I really was; "we can have one run before breakfast."

Off we set until Susie ran laughing in with a fine colour in her cheeks. She was hungry, and we knew two steaming bowls of bread and milk were waiting for us, but, alas! the spirit of mischief prompted me to go round to the stable-yard,

for one look at the array of mud-pies Sue had made on Thursday, and which had stood there ever since. They were in a shady place ; she had not chosen her oven well ; the sun could not possibly bake them there ; Friday's rain had soaked them too. The old iron spoon lay near. I set to work. I plastered and flattened them, I fetched spoonfuls of water from a puddle near, I transplanted the whole baking, pie by pie, to a large flat stone, full in the sunshine, in the middle of the yard. At first I did try to guard my frock, but one splash and dab of mud fell upon it, and then another, and at last, when I seized the gardener's great heavy watering-pot, just to give one wash over the pies to "set them," I upset it all over me. Not only was the blue merino dirty now, but it was "wringing" wet.

What *was* to be done now? What *would* become of me?

I rushed into the house and upstairs as fast as I could go, but at the nursery door I stood still. It was ajar. I heard nurse's voice.

"In mischief, I 'll be bound," she was saying, and I knew she was speaking of me. I turned

away and crept in at the door of the night nursery. My clean cotton lay on the bed all ready for me to put on. Nurse had run the string in while I was away. To tear off the merino was the work of a moment—it lay a soaked bundle on the floor at my feet. What *should* I do with it? With great difficulty I managed to tie my own cotton, and to fasten the band, trembling all the time for fear nurse should come. It looked all right, and no one would have guessed that I had no frock undernearth, for the spotted cotton was freshly starched, and stuck out nicely. I seized the poor merino and thrust it into the cupboard, then hurried to the day nursery. Nurse, poor innocent woman, was quite pleased to see that I had dressed so neatly all by myself; she had kept my bread and milk hot for me on the hob, and I was certainly very glad of my breakfast. By degrees I dismissed the thought of my merino from my mind—she would find it sometime or other I knew, and when she found it she would be very angry indeed. I should have confessed to mamma if I had had the opportunity, but she was not very well just then; on this particular day she

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was obliged to stay in her room with a bad headache, and Sue and I were told not to go to her.

I thought it very cold in the garden that morning, and no wonder!—I was not half-clothed, and shivered even in the sunshine. Though we were free now to play at mud-pics or anything we pleased, I could not enjoy myself; for every time I heard nurse's voice, or saw her coming to fetch us in to our meals, I thought—

“She has opened the cupboard door!—she has found the merino!”

But she did not find it; and being very busy helping Mrs Parsons to prepare for the school-children, she took little notice of us. After dinner the children came. Roger and Ned and Sue and I met them at the front door, and, marshalling them two and two, led them through the hall and down the stone stairs to the servants' hall, where their feast was spread; and when they had received their prizes, and listened to a short speech from the rector (who had walked over to lunch with our parents), the elders left us to wait upon our little guests. Eating occupied some time, for it was

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quite wonderful what a quantity of roast-beef and plum-pudding they managed to find room for; but dinner was over at last, and Ned ran upstairs to ask whether we were to play in the house or out. I secretly hoped we should be told to keep in-doors, or, at all events, that only the boys would be sent out, and Sue and I left to amuse the girls in the house; but it was so fine and mild that day, that word came down for us all to troop into the park, and every one but myself was glad to obey. Racing and playing "drop handkerchief" and "nuts in May" soon warmed me; but, though I did not know it, that was really dangerous; for as soon as I got thoroughly heated I of course stood still to rest, and not being properly clothed, the end of it was that I caught a violent chill. In the course of the afternoon, Aunt Lydia drove over from Yellowfields. She persuaded mamma to come downstairs and lie on the drawing-room sofa, and they both stood for some time at the window looking on at our games. I was dreadfully sorry to see Aunt Lydia, for now I knew that we should be expected to go down to the drawing-room after

our tea, and that our cottons would be taken off ! Silly child that I was ! Did I expect to be able to *hide my wrong-doing altogether* ?

The children went away. We were sent up to tea in the nursery ; and, as a great treat, old Mrs Brown, who had been papa's nurse when he was a little boy, and who had come up to the house to bring her two little grand-daughters to the feast, was invited to drink tea with us. As a rule, I was always very glad when Nurse Brown came. Sue and I enjoyed hearing stories of papa when he was a child, and we enjoyed showing the old woman all our new toys and books, and hearing her funny remarks upon them. I liked hearing our own nurse and Mrs Brown talk, it was something quite different from any other conversation I had a chance of listening to, and used in general to amuse me mightily—but this evening nothing amused me. As we ran upstairs, Ned had pursued us with the message I dreaded receiving—we were to be put tidy and come down to the drawing-room after tea. This was enough to make me miserable, and, as a consequence, very cross. I never remem-

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ber that we quarrelled amongst ourselves, as I have heard of other children doing, but of course we “had our tempers ;” and when Roger and Ned, who were in wild spirits, found how dull I was, Roger called me a “sulky little thing,” and Ned would keep rushing at me, in order, he explained, to frighten the black dog off my shoulder. Nurse thought I was not well.

“What is it, Miss Gracie ?” she said, and wanted to take me on her knee in the low rocking-chair. “She’s easy tired, that child—always was so from a baby,” said nurse to Mrs Brown ; “and the riot of to-day has been *that* trying that I’m tired myself.”

I was not at all too big, at nearly eight years old, to enjoy being petted when I felt ill or weary ; but I was not going to sit on nurse’s knee *that* evening, and let her feel how thin I was—no nice warm merino under my cotton. I kept the table between her and me, and loitered over my tea as much as I could. At last, however, Sue and I went into the night-nursery to be got ready for the drawing-room ; and Sue had a fancy for old Nurse

Brown to dress her, so both women came with us. Susie's cotton was off in a moment, her frock shaken out, her pretty curls brushed smooth, and her little hands and face washed. I dawdled over my washing.

"Miss Grace, you 'll never be done," said nurse. "Here, let me untie your cotton."

"Get away, do!" I exclaimed very rudely, for fear of the impending discovery had by this time made me reckless; "I mean to dress myself."

"I 'm astonished at you, Miss. Of course you can dress yourself, and it 's only right you should; but the new tape I put in only this morning is knotted—I can see that; come here directly, my dear, and let me undo it."

I dodged her round the room with the wet sponge in my hand, with which I pretended to be still washing my face, and would not let her come near me.

"Let *me* dress you, deary," said Nurse Brown.

"No; it 's no business of yours—don't interfere," I gasped from behind the sponge. But our nurse was angry now. She caught hold of me, whisked

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me round, undid the band of my spotted cotton, and had the tape in her hand, when—I’m ashamed to tell you what I did!—I wriggled away from her, turned round and threw the wet sponge right at her cap!—and it was her new Sunday cap, put on in honour of the feast! When I had done it, I was so frightened that I began to cry. Nurse could hardly believe her senses. She stared at me for a moment, then, with her fine frilled cap all on one side and splashed with wet, she marched straight to the cupboard door, threw it open, and turned to address me.

“I’m sorry to do it, Miss Grace, and spccially before Mrs Brown, but into the cupboard you go, and Master Roger shall take a message for me to his mamma.”

“What’s the row?” demanded Roger, who, hearing an unusual commotion, popped his head into the room. “Why, Grace! what are you crying for?”

Nurse pointed with much dignity to my destined prison. I crept forward—*she had not seen the merino.* In my then state of mind, I would rather

far be shut up with it for any length of time than that she *should* see it. But as I obeyed the motion of her hand, and walked into the cupboard, nurse followed me with her eyes;—there was a moment of suspense—in the next she had pounced upon the unfortunate frock—held it at arm's length—stared first at it, then at me—and finally, without a word, snapped the knotted tape round my neck, stripped off my spotted cotton, and holding that in one hand and the merino in the other, looked at them alternately in speechless dismay. Considering that she had not rectified damages as to her head-dress, she must have made a funny figure.

The first sound heard was a peal of laughter from Roger. It roused nurse.

“ *You* may laugh, sir,” she said, “ but *Miss Grace*”— and without deigning another word she left the room, the two garments in her hand. She had said enough; the tone of that “ *Miss Grace* ” told us unmistakeably that she had gone to make a formal complaint of me, and that whatever might

be the case with Roger *I* had no cause for laughter.

Well, I was sent to bed in disgrace, as I richly deserved to be, and was moreover shut up in the nursery with a heavy cold for some days after. Dear me, how silly I felt when mamma asked—

“What *did* you expect, Grace? did you think you would *never* be found out? and what did you suppose would happen if you had gone honestly to nurse at once, after spoiling your merino?”

“She’d have shut me up,” I sobbed.

“Well?”

Mamma waited for an answer, but none came. It struck me now, that of course nurse would have let me out again after a while; I should not have had *half* so wretched a day, *if I had not tried to hide my fault.*

Roger laughed at me for a long time after this, and it really was *months* before nurse ceased speaking of it, and I haven’t heard the last of it yet. Whenever my eye falls on the border of my

quilt, the spotted cotton remarks with perfect distinctness :

“ You are right enough *outside*, my friend, as you were the day you wore *me* to hide a fault—how is it within ? ” and forthwith proceeds to tell me this story, every word of it.

CHAPTER V.

THE WIND'S STORY.

ON looking back to our childish days, it really seems as if we had *two* papas. There is no break in my recollection of our mother, but the father who went away on my eighth birthday, does not, somehow or other, *join on* well to the father who returned to us nearly four years afterwards. We thought it impossible that Susie could remember him at all, but she stoutly maintained she did—that is, she remembered *a* Papa; one who had carried her home before him on his horse the day she had gone astray seeking for cowslip bells, who used to give her rides on his shoulder, and with whose waistcoat pocket her tiny fingers were very familiar, for sugar-plums were always to be found there; but I don't believe she remembered *the* papa, the right one; I fancy she would have passed him without recognising him at all, if they

had met unexpectedly in the road. Even I had to learn him over again, and found that I had "remembered wrong," as we used to say. It is quite surprising how very wrong one can remember some things. I had an idea that papa was a very tall man—in fact, the *first* papa *was* tall. Sue sat on his knee to explore the recesses of the waistcoat pocket, but I could just get the tips of my fingers there when he stood upright. His head was very high up in the world indeed, and when he looked lovingly down upon us, I remember the thought passing through my mind, that if one could only be as tall as papa, one would stride over all one's faults, and not get entangled in them, as I used to feel that I was; my faults seemed like high weeds, growing over my head and choking me. I had to beat them down to get free. I thought this would not be the case if I were grown up, but, dear me! I *am* grown up now, and the faults are over my head still, and I have to beat them down still as hard as ever.

But about papa. I can't say how surprised I was to find when he came home, that as I stood

beside him, and his arm was thrown round me, it was quite convenient and comfortable to lay "my head on his shoulder!" or when we were walking together, to lean upon his arm. The other papa's *hand* used to be quite high enough up for me. Then there were no white hairs on the first papa's head, and he used to *run*—I'm sure of that—run down the garden, and leap over a certain white barred gate at the bottom of it. I can't fancy the second papa doing it. I don't believe *he* ever did it in his life. When I said this to him once, he remarked that he was sure he never made a habit of running, he may have done it once or twice, perhaps, and it seemed to have made an impression on me—he could do it now if he chose. But he never did choose.

I tried one day to remember what was the very *first* thing that I recollect of my father, and I think it was not any particular adventure or event, but simply a sense of safety that I experienced whenever I was with him. I never felt half so safe with the second papa as I had done with the first, perhaps, because as I grew older I knew that there

were dangers from which even my father might find it impossible to protect me. And this is one of the ways in which papa number two does not *join on* to papa number one ; if he had never gone away, I do not think I should ever have lost the sense of absolute safety in his presence, or I should have lost it so very gradually that I should hardly have noticed it slipping away from me.

I must have been a nervous, timid child. I was afraid of—oh, so many things ! I have told you about the rain, how it used to terrify me, and make me utterly wretched to hear it dashing down. I always felt as if it never, never would stop, and as if there was nothing but rain in all the world. I did not consider that it would do any particular harm—drown us, or wash the world away—I did not *consider* at all ; the mere *fact* of the rain was dreadful enough, I did not mind what it would *do*. But if papa was with me in the same room when a sudden rain-storm came on, it was not only that his presence comforted me, I did not even begin to be frightened ; I did not care for the rain at all.

Then the dark ; it was well for me Susie was the youngest ; I never slept alone, she was always in bed first. But to set off against that comfortable fact, I had to go upstairs alone, and that was dreadful. I would not for anything have relinquished my privilege of staying up an hour after Sue, but the misery of going upstairs to bed is what I never shall forget. Roger and Ned went half-an-hour later than I did. Sometimes Roger would come up with me, and then run down again ; but of course he laughed at my idle fears, and so I never begged for his protection if I could possibly resist the inclination to do so. Nurse would not fetch me. She persuaded mamma to let her have her own way in this, and though my dear mother never scolded me for my silliness, she was too wise to let me suppose there were real grounds for fear, by letting me see any trouble taken to provide protection. She used to pity me, as she would have done for any other trial, and comfort me by promising that if I lived, I should outgrow this trouble, and learn to laugh at it. I liked papa's wisdom better ! Often and often has he stood at the foot of the

stairs, while I ran up them, and waited till he heard the nursery door shut upon his foolish little girl. The stairs were not in perfect darkness of course. But then the dreadful shadows thrown by the swinging lamp had to be passed, and the dark corners were darker still in contrast with the light places.

You will laugh at me, when I tell you that another of my terrors was caused by—the gong ! Nothing worse than that. It was horrible when they struck it for prayers or dinner, but that was by no means the worst, older folks than myself thought *that* horrible. I have seen Aunt Lydia stop her ears when she heard it, and listened to her scolding my father for “keeping such a creature in the house.”

I am sure *I* wished he would get rid of the “creature.” It was when it was *not* sounding, when it hung grim, and black, and silent from its stand at the foot of the stairs, that I dreaded it most. I don’t know whether I thought it would go off by itself, whether I fancied it was alive. I don’t know *what* I thought, or *what* I fancied, I only know the

gong was an object of deadly terror to me. I can't remember when this fear ceased ; of course it *did* cease ; mamma's words were true ; that and all my other childish terrors were outgrown one by one !

I was afraid of cows. Not so much of our own cows, though I did not quite like it when the boys hunted them about, and made them run, but strange cows were dreadful to me. Yet I never felt one instant's alarm at them, if papa were with us when we met them. I remember one year when a number of cattle were grazing in the park, that my father sometimes went out with a dog to count them. I used gladly to go with him. He made the dog keep near him, and very soon all the young cattle would gather round us, attracted by curiosity, stooping to snuff the ground, coming crowding about us, staring out of their large eyes, stamping with their hoofs. It would have terrified me out of my senses if papa had not been there ; as it was I enjoyed it very much. But these sort of terrors were nothing to the gong, and the dark, and the sky, (yes, I was dreadfully afraid of the sky !) and I am very glad now to think that in all

our childhood I never infected Susie with my foolish fears. *She* was never afraid of anything, never seemed to imagine that anything in all the world would hurt little Sue ; dark or light, rain or shine, strangers or friends, all came alike to her.

Of course I am telling you now of the time when I was a very little girl ; a great many of my fears were outgrown before my eighth birthday ; but I have still a distinct recollection of how I dreaded to look up at the great skylight over the staircase in our old home. There was *nothing* there but the sky, and it was so mysteriously alive ! The clouds came rolling across the skylight, great masses of clouds, hardly less terrifying to my childish imagination when they were black and heavy with threats of a coming storm, than when they floated above me white and pure and spirit-like. Once as I was creeping up the stairs trying not to think about the clouds, papa came out on the landing with a friend of his who was staying with us then, and I heard him say, "What fine masses of *cumuli*," or some such words, I can't remember them exactly, and did

not understand them in the least, but as I leant against the bannisters, and watched the rolling masses of clouds drifting overhead, and listened to the conversation going on between papa and his friend, it dawned upon me that *they* knew all about the *cumuli*, or whatever they called it ; the clouds were not the same awful mysteries to every one that they had been to poor little me : here was papa apparently on the most intimate terms with them, certainly not in the least awe-struck by them. I was never so very much afraid of them again ; the thought of papa and his *cumuli* was a great comfort to me.

It was some months before my eighth birthday that papa got the appointment abroad, which took him away from us for so long a time, but, though we had all those months in which to look forward to the parting, it came with unexpected suddenness at last, and you may fancy my childish sorrow when I tell you that I never said good-bye to him at all !

I was born in November. Most years my birthday was one of those still, quiet, mild days that

are common in that month, but now and then the anniversary fell upon a day of storm and wild wind—a sort of day I hated. It was so this year. A chill rain fell from time to time, the wind howled round the house, my enemies the clouds drifted across the sky. We knew papa would go very soon now. Everything was ready for his departure. Our mother wore her usual sweet smile when talking to or playing with us, but at other times she looked sad and pale. She and papa held long conversations together, in low tones, even when we were with them, and often seemed to forget that we were in the room at all. They were talking together on this morning, as I sat on a low stool in the drawing-room window, engaged in spreading out all my birthday presents on the broad ledge. There was a little sugar dog, Susie's gift (she had not been able to resist eating one paw), and a new book from Roger, a little gilt book which must have cost at least sixpence; for its paper cover was beautifully illuminated in red and gold, and there were twenty pages of print, and a frightful woodcut as frontispiece. Ned was out of pocket

money—he often was—and had given a work of art done by himself; it was a picture of papa drawn on the back of one of his own visiting cards, which was lucky, as one had the name and all in the same frame, so that there could be no mistake as to whom it was meant for. Papa himself had given me a work-box, and had told me how he expected that I should learn the use of it during his absence, so that when he returned, he might find a notable eldest daughter who would mend his gloves and be mamma's right hand. Mamma's gift was a new doll, undressed, I was to dress it myself, she said, or where was the use of papa's present. The wind was very high; at moments the murmur of my parents' voices reached my ears, at others it was drowned altogether in a wild blast, and the way in which the blast died sadly out, and went wailing and sighing round to the back of the house, was truly dismal. It had an effect upon my nerves which I could not control. I began to sob. I *thought* I was crying about papa—it was odd how convenient I had found it to cry about papa lately! If I had felt cross in the nursery I cried

about him, and of course nurse could not be so cruel as to scold a poor little girl fretting over the coming separation from her father! Mamma was wiser: if the sums *wouldn't* come right, or the places on the map find themselves in lesson-time, I immediately remembered dear papa was going away and began to whimper; but mamma said that lesson-time was not the time to cry about papa, and called mine "foolish tears" (which always cost us a penny by way of forfeit), just as if there had been no sorrow in the house! This morning, however, she did not find fault with me, but called me to her, and my father took me on his knee, and I was happy listening to him and mamma as they went on talking. The boys and Susie came round us.

"I shall take care of mamma and the girls," said Roger for the hundredth time.

"Take care you give her no trouble," said papa, "but I am not going just yet, so Gracie need shed no more tears upon a birthday, *even* if the wind blows very loud."

I felt my cheeks grow hot, and knew then that

nervous fear of the weather had had more to do with my crying than thoughts of papa had.

Mamma said birthdays were always merry days, and tried to brighten up and amuse us, but she was very dull herself; for although she did not suspect that the parting was so very near at hand, yet she realised better than we did, how short a time remained in which our dear father's presence would make our home happy. At last papa told Roger to ring the bell and order the pony carriage.

"It is not raining now," said he, "we'll ship them all off to Yellowfields, and Roger shall drive."

So mamma wrote a letter to Aunt Lydia, and when we were all warmly dressed, we packed ourselves into the pony carriage under the charge of the old gardener, and Roger drove the pony in fine style. The fun and the laughter soon roused me, and I ceased to be afraid and nervous, though the wind was so strong that Roger could hardly hold the reins, and the way in which Beppo's mane was blown about was quite extraordinary. I was not afraid of the wind *out of doors*, it was only in the house when I heard it moaning and sobbing round

the corners, or shrieking amongst the chimneys on the roof, that it frightened me and made me nervous.

"I don't mind it when I can see it," I shouted to Roger, for we could hardly hear each other speak.

"No one can *see* wind!" he shouted in answer.

"Look there then!" and I pointed to the bending trees in the hedge-row, the trees that were tossing their arms in the air wildly, their great boughs creaking and groaning, and *such* a rustling going on amongst the fast-falling autumn leaves.

"That's what it *does*—it's not itself," remarked Roger, leaning back afterwards to shout to Ned, "I say, Grace can *see* the wind :" and they both laughed as much as if I had made a joke.

Off went Sue's hat, and scudded along before us till it was caught in the hedge! Beppo pricked his ears and quite understood he was to chase it. We had not ceased laughing over this adventure when farther progress was stopped altogether. A huge elm lay right across the road, blown down by the storm.

What was to be done? Jacob, the gardener, bade us all get out, and go the rest of the way on foot, for we were close to Yellowfields now. He would take back the pony chaise, and before night the tree would be moved away, and the road clear again; it had been arranged that we were to return in Aunt Lydia's close carriage. But as you may suppose it was a long time before he could persuade us to leave the tree at all! Such a glorious opportunity, you know! a fine large elm on the ground! We ran along the trunk, held by the branches, climbed as much as we could. Sue contenting herself with being lifted on to the trunk by Jacob, and sitting there singing, as she held on tightly with both hands, otherwise the wind might have carried her away altogether, but I doing my best to emulate the deeds of daring performed by the boys. Oh, how often does the wind sing to me still of the fallen elm, with its great branches, of little Sue sitting on the trunk, of our wild scramble, and of all that happened that November afternoon! At last we tore ourselves away, and holding on our hats as best we

could, ran on to Yellowfields. Aunt Lydia was very glad to see us, and we quieted down as soon as we reached the house, entered in an orderly manner, did not forget our bows and curtsies, or to kiss her hand respectfully, so that we were in high favour. When our aunt had read mamma's note, we were told we might stay at Yellowfields till seven o'clock, and that a fine "birthday tea" should be ready at five, and then we were dismissed to the empty rooms. This was our chief pleasure at Yellowfields. Though the house was small, it was larger than Aunt Lydia required, and for some years after she first came to live there, all the bedrooms on one floor remained unfurnished. We might do what we liked there, make as much litter and as much noise as we pleased. Though in the drawing-room Aunt Lydia was always saying "hush!" she submitted to a wonderful amount of noise overhead, and though if we moved so much as a chair from its place downstairs, we were expected to put it back again exactly where we had found it, yet upstairs we were gloriously untidy, and what is more, never found that any of

our out-of-door treasures, chips, moss, litter of all kinds, were interfered with in our absence. The empty rooms seemed completely given up to us. This might have taught us how really kind Aunt Lydia was, but in those days we were silly children, and always more or less afraid of her.

After a good game of romps, the boys took it into their heads to play hide-and-seek. When we chose this game, Sue and I generally hid together, and the boys together, but this afternoon Sue was tired, and went away to the drawing-room, where she amused herself with some picture-books.

"You mustn't be troublesome, you know, child, or I shall send you away," said Aunt Lydia, and I presume Susie was *not* troublesome, for she remained in the drawing-room until tea was ready.

Meantime I found I was expected to hide alone. I did not like it at all, because of the wind, but then if I told Roger this, he and Ned would laugh at me, so I tried to be as brave as I could. But very soon my brothers complained that I chose such stupid, easily-discovered hiding-places, that

it was no "fun," and I found I must venture farther away, and play in my usual manner. When it was my turn again, I went boldly up the flight of stairs, between the floor we were on and the one above, and entered the first open door I saw. It was the cook's room. There was a brown counterpane on the bed, a smart bonnet half covered with a pocket handkerchief stood on the chest of drawers, near it lay a prayer-book and a cookery-book, both much worn, there was no carpet on the floor, and apparently no means of hiding one's self in the room at all. I had never been up there before. As I looked round I noticed a print dress hanging on a peg behind the door, and a woollen dress thrown over the back of a chair near the window. I saw in a moment that, by crouching down between the wall and the chair on which this last dress was hung, I might be safely hidden, and I established myself there at once. I soon heard the boys running about in the rooms below, and their voices talking to each other, and, by-and-by, they came upstairs, and into the room where I was, but they did not find me, and went away again. This was

good fun. I could see Roger plainly as he stood in the doorway, and it amused me to watch how puzzled he looked, and to hear him say to Ned,

“There's no place to hide here, and she has no business to be here if there was.”

The last words rather alarmed me, for we were all very much afraid of cook. Once she had taken Ned by the shoulders, and shaken him for some piece of mischief or other, and, worse than that, on one occasion when Roger and I had invaded the kitchen, she had gone upstairs taking us with her, and complained to Aunt Lydia. I remember now how I hung upon her hand, and coaxed her and *besought* her not to tell of us, and called her “dear cook” much to Roger's disgust; he said it was mean of me, and she might tell if she liked, but he was as angry with her as I was, when we were both sent home from Yellowfields in disgrace. What *would* she do to me if she found me in her very bed-room? Still it was such fun to have hidden successfully, that I would not come out till the boys were gone; as soon as I heard their steps on the stairs, I would run down I thought;

but I *couldn't* hear their steps; the wind had grown louder than ever, it shook and rattled the window behind me, and a frightful rain-storm dashed against the glass. Trembling with fear I was just creeping out from the folds of the linsey gown, when—cook herself came into the room! This fear conquered the other. I curled up again behind the chair, and remained motionless. She *had come up to dress for the afternoon*, and oh, what a time she was about it! Sometimes I saw her plainly, at others she moved about the room out of my sight. I saw her do up her back hair, and wondered at the quantity of oil she put upon it; I saw her take off her gown and hang it up where the print dress hung behind the door, and then I began to wonder whether she meant to put on the linsey; I turned sick with fear every time she came near the chair, and once when she actually sat down on it I nearly screamed. She put clean stockings on while she sat there, and I supposed she was *not* going to wear the linsey, for she had crushed it, and crumpled the part hanging over the seat of the chair, so that I felt sure it

could not be her best gown. I was right. Cook went to the chest of drawers, pulled out the bottom one, and produced her smart black silk. She had been nearly an hour dressing, and I can tell you I wondered where the others were, and what they thought of my being so long missing, and whether tea was ready, and then I was stiff and cramped with keeping so still, I ached all over; but anything was better than letting her know where I was, and having her march me down to Aunt Lydia, and tell of me before my face, as she had done on that dreadful day long ago.

The storm grew wilder and wilder. Aunt Lydia's house was not so firmly built as ours, it seemed to shake with the wind, and the boards creaked and groaned; by the time cook had fastened her black silk dress and settled her cap I was half prepared to risk all, and follow her downstairs, so much did I dread being left alone, but one glance at her stern, hard face made me decide to remain where I was till she had left the room. As she was in the act of doing so, the housemaid entered hurriedly—they knocked heads together in the

doorway. Cook was very cross, her fine cap was disarranged, she came back to the glass to put it straight again.

"And what was you wanting, Jemima?" she demanded severely; "it's hard if I can't have an hour to myself to clean myself without being run up against in my own doorway."

"You've not seen nothing of little Miss Grace, have you, cook?" asked Jemima, "her papa's been here, and we've been looking the house over for her. The young gentlemen said she was hiding, but not they nor ne'er a one of us can find her. I only hope nothing have happened," and Jemima sunk her voice.

"As how?" asked cook.

"Chesties, or anythink of that kind. I've heard tell of them as hid in a chest and was never heard of more."

"You're that silly as you'd believe *anything* you might hear," said cook scornfully, and her cap being once more arranged to her satisfaction, she and Jemima went away together.

I crept forth from my hiding-place. "Papa been

here!" what could he have come for? It was almost dark out on the landing; as I went downstairs, the wind sounded mournfully round the house—I never hear it now without recalling that evening. No one was in the empty rooms. I called,

"Roger! Ned!"

No answer, only the rattling of the windows, only the wailing of the blast. I went down another flight to the drawing-room door—as I passed the dining-room I looked in. No one was there either. Tea was laid, a fine large cake graced the centre of the table, and bore my name on a white flag planted in the middle of it. I knew by these preparations that it must be past five o'clock, and possessed with a dread of I knew not what, I crept to the drawing-room, but as I stood trying to summon courage to turn the handle of the door, it was thrown open, and Aunt Lydia nearly fell over me.

"Why, here she is! Grace, where have you been? Come, dear," and so saying Aunt Lydia led me into the room. She spoke gently. and had a

handkerchief in her hand, I half thought she had been crying, but dismissed the idea from my mind again immediately—what *could* Aunt Lydia have to cry about? I told her where I had hidden, and that I had been afraid to come out till cook had gone away.

“Silly child! You have lost”—but here Aunt Lydia broke off, drew me to her and kissed me, adding in a lighter tone, “Come, little girl, the birthday feast is ready.”

We all went into the dining-room, but somehow or other it was not a merry birthday feast. There seemed something wrong, I could not make out what. Roger was very silent, and there was a curious flushed look upon his face. Ned and Susie were much as usual, but it was plain *they* had both been crying. I felt as if it was my fault, but Aunt Lydia was wonderfully kind and gentle to me, it did not look as if she thought I had been naughty.

“There’s a secret,” whispered Sue, holding up her dear little face to mine, “I mustn’t tell.”

“What did papa come for?” I asked.

“That’s it,” said Ned, “that’s the secret.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Aunt Lydia sharply; “have some more cake, Grace?—no; well, run away and put on your things, I am going to take you home myself, and to stay with your mamma all night.”

“I suppose that's your grand secret,” I remarked to Ned as we left the table, “I suppose papa came to ask Aunt Lydia to come and stay.”

I was glad to go home; I felt a strange longing to see mamma. The storm had almost worn itself out by this time, but a steady rain was falling, and now and then a gust of wind made the chariot rock as we drove home. It was quite dark out of doors, so that our eyes were half blinded by the lights in the drawing-room when we went in, and I did not for a moment see that mamma was alone. I fancied it was because it was my birthday that she greeted me more fondly than the others, and kept me by her side with her arm thrown round me, while Aunt Lydia stood on the hearth-rug talking.

“Grace was found at last,” she said, “I think he ought to be told as soon as possible.”

“I wish I could *tell* him anything,” mamma answered; “I will write to-morrow, but *he* didn't

suppose his little daughter was lost for good and all."

"It happened most unfortunately," said Aunt Lydia poking the fire viciously, as if "it," whatever it might be, was the fault of the poker, and she was bent upon punishing it.

I could not understand what they meant.

"Where's papa?" I asked, raising my head from mamma's shoulder, where it had been comfortably resting.

It was then that my dear mother, holding me in her loving arms, told me that papa was gone. Hastily summoned by an express messenger, he had still found time to gallop over to Yellowfields, taking a short cut there by a bridle-path, in order to say good-bye to his poor little children—but *I* could not be found! In vain had Roger and Ned sought everywhere for me; in vain had the servants been questioned. The only servant not asked was cook, who was upstairs "cleaning herself," as she called it; and the very last place any one would have dreamt of searching was the cook's bed-room! Aunt Lydia had been in a state of

great alarm, but papa laughed at her fears. He said he was sure I should turn up again all right by-and-by, and he was only grieved to think how sorry I should be when I knew what I had missed by such successful hiding. It was by his wish—so kind and thoughtful was he for us always—that it should be left for my mother to tell me that I had lost his parting kiss. There was a little letter for me from him, and that was some comfort, but though I slept with it under my pillow, I cried myself to sleep, and waking in the night, the wailing sound of the wind seemed repeating over and over again, "Papa is gone, and I never saw him to say good-bye!"

Sometimes when I lie awake on stormy nights the wind repeats these words again; and whenever it blows very hard, and the trees bend in the blast, or autumn leaves drop down and are whirled along the ground, and doors and windows rattle, and old houses shake, the wind tells me this story of my eighth birthday, of the fallen elm, the game at hide-and-seek, and the horrid cross cook who prevented my saying good-bye to my dear papa—for

of course it was *cook's* fault, and not at all that of the silly, cowardly little girl, crouched down behind the greasy old linsey dress for a whole hour because she was afraid to come out!

CHAPTER VI.

PLUMCAKE'S STORY.

TO this day I never see a slice—black with currants, rich with citron, having here and there a little bit of almond in it—without thinking of this story ! I really wonder, grown-up woman though I am, that my checks do not get red and hot and burn now at the remembrance of the dreadful time when I was *found out*, just as they burned then ! Never be “*found out*,” little folks ; it is *so* uncomfortable ; and the only way I know of to avoid it is never to do anything you are ashamed of.

It happened one afternoon when I had gone with mamma to visit an old lady, a friend of hers. This lady was very kind to children ; and though, as a rule, we hated paying visits, we did not mind being taken to *her* house. She was quite blind ;

and it was a constant marvel to me to see how fast her knitting-pins moved when I knew she had no sight to direct them with. The niece who used to live with her had lately married, and mamma's call that day was to congratulate her old friend on the event.

There was a strange lady in the drawing-room when we were shown in, and I felt rather shy, even when she took notice of me very kindly, and told mamma she had little girls of her own. One of them was with her now, at least she said so; but the gaily-dressed young lady with her hair in ringlets, who came in through the open French window a moment after, did not come up—or, perhaps, I should say, come *down* to my notions of a "little girl." I thought her dreadfully "grown up;" and all the time she was talking to me I could feel how childish she thought me, and that she was condescending to juvenile topics of conversation for my sake, which was not pleasant. I felt more shy than ever. By-and-by the bell was rung, and the servant desired to bring in some wedding-cake. Now, can you believe that when

it was handed round I was so silly as to say, "No, thank you," although, of course, I wanted some very much? But the truth is, that by that time I was quite miserable with shyness.

"No cake, my dear?" said the strange lady.
"Don't you like it?"

And then I said, "No;" and the moment I had said so I was sorry for it—first, because it was not true, and, secondly, because the cake looked so good. If mamma had been attending to me she would have seen at once how stupidly I was behaving, and would have helped me out of the difficulty; but she was talking very busily to our hostess, and not noticing me at all.

Well, when no one would have any more cake the plate was set down on the top of a cabinet at the end of the room; and in a pause in her talk with mamma our dear old friend remembered me and called me to her side. I liked standing there watching her swift knitting-needles, and being asked all about our lessons and our play, and whether Roger and Ned were home from school, and how Susie was; and after a while she told me

I might go and look at the cabinet, always a favourite amusement of ours when we came to see her. I went off all by myself to the very end of the long room; as for the young lady with the ringlets, she quite gave me up as too babyish to talk to, and troubled her head no more about me—indeed, she and her mamma both of them went out into the garden to gather some choice flowers for my mamma to take home with her. Now, as I have said, the cake was on the top of the cabinet; there was only one piece left, and you have no idea how very, very good it looked and smelt! First, there was a little piece of fair white sugar, then the especially nice almond stuff that goes round wedding-cake, and then the cake itself so black and rich. I looked round at mamma, but she was sitting with her back to me; and although the blind lady's face was turned in my direction, of course *she* could not see what I did. The temptation was *too* strong. I raised my frock and slipped the cake into my pocket!

Perhaps you wonder why I raised my frock. That was because pockets then were not made as

they are nowadays—if they had been, pray how could “Lucy Locket” have lost hers? You little girls of to-day would be puzzled how to lose your pockets, unless you lost your frocks too; but ours were quite separate from the rest of our dress—neat, strongly stitched white pockets, fastened round our waists by a tape, and of course under our frocks.

Just as I had safely disposed of my theft, back came the lady and her daughter with their hands full of flowers, and I was called to assist in tying them up. This brought me close to our old friend; and I had hardly stood there an instant before she said—

“Dear child, ring the bell to have the cake removed—the smell is quite unpleasant.”

Imagine my feelings! Of course I knew there was no cake on the plate, but I rang the bell all the same; and to my great relief, when the servant answered it every one was very busy talking, and his mistress only signed to him—or rather the lady staying with her did so—to take away the now empty plate. How I congratulated myself!

But my troubles were not over; for what subject did my mamma and the mother of the young lady with ringlets begin to talk about but—pockets! The strange lady wanted a good pattern, and mamma said that the one her children wore was very convenient.

“Come here a moment, Gracie,” she said, “and show this lady your pocket.”

I never stirred. I was still standing close to the mistress of the house, who suddenly remarked—“I thought I desired that the cake might be sent away—I smell it still.”

“It is gone, dear madam,” replied her friend.

It was *not* gone you know, and no wonder she smelt it—it was very near her indeed.

“Grace, come here,” mamma called to me again. But I was not going to show my pocket to any one. I stood quite still.

Then mamma got up and came to me, and putting her hand on my shoulder, spoke as if she were very much displeased at my bad manners—as well she might be.

“Did you hear me desire you to show this lady

your pocket? Grace! what are you dreaming of?"

"I can't!—I won't!" I began, and the lady politely begged my mother not to tease me. But she, really angry now, and quite at a loss to account for my extraordinary behaviour, lifted up the skirt of my frock and displayed my unfortunate pocket stuffed out with cake, for it had been full before, and the topmost article amongst its contents was only too plainly visible!

There was dead silence. Just think what I felt, and how I wished the ground would open and swallow me up! But the ground never does open and hide us when we have done anything foolish and wrong—we just have to stand there and endure the shame. And so I stood, feeling my cheeks scorching hot, not daring to raise my eyes, wishing there was no such thing as plumcake in all the world. At last I heard a queer sort of tittering noise, which made me look up. I soon looked down again, feeling hotter and more miserable than before—the young lady with the ringlets and her mamma were laughing! I had *much* rather

they had struck me. My own dear mother did not laugh, and presently she said—

“I see how this was ; my little girl was too shy to accept a piece of cake when offercd her, and was afterwards ashamed to change her mind and ask for it. But it would have been better to have changed your mind than to have *stolen*, Grace—more lady-like, and less sly.”

I have never forgotten that day.

“Pray, have some cake”—when a kind friend makes me that little speech, I either take the offered dainty or not, as I feel inclined ; but whether I accept or refuse it, the piece of cake at once begins to tell me this story of long ago, and amid the polite conversation going on around me, I hear its voice quite plainly, and never miss a word.

CHAPTER VII.

LIMITED INCOMES.

WELL, I suppose prices have risen ; everything seems dear, and I certainly hear people talk a great deal more of the expense of living than they talked of such matters when I was young. Once upon a time it was not polite to ask your friend what rent he paid for his house, or a lady you had only just been introduced to how much she gave her cook, and in those days it used to require a little effort to confess one "couldn't afford" this or that. But *now*—dear me ! it seems fashionable to be poor, and quite a matter of course to discuss with any casual acquaintance how to make the most of a limited income.

"Limited income" indeed ! what do you say to sixpence a week ? I call *that* limited, with toffy at a penny the ounce, and only the narrowest of narrow ribbon to be had at a halfpenny a yard,

and three birthday presents to buy in the year, to say nothing of one's private charities! the penny to the old woman at the church door, and something to put in the plate after a missionary sermon. The other morning I came across two old account-books ; the writing in them was in an unformed school-girl's hand, and there were many blots. On one page of each was written in large letters the word "Received," and on the opposite page "Spent," and the accounts were correctly balanced at the foot of every column, with a very large neatly written "Cash in hand" facing the amount left to carry over. I must confess the amount was seldom large ; the average for "Cash in hand" was twopence - halfpenny, but then it looked business like. Susie's book was much more neatly kept than mine ; though she was so much younger she always wrote better than I did—she did *everything* better—good little Sue ! If you have not found out how much the best of all of us Sue was, why, I am sorry for you.

Under the head of "Received," was written, on every line down the page, the word "Allowance,"

with the date of each succeeding week affixed. The uniformity of these pages was pleasantly broken here and there by "Gift from papa, one penny," or "Aunt Lydia, one shilling," and *once*, on one of my own pages, by a word I was very proud of, and did really write with the greatest care and neatness—

"Earned: one penny."

Did you ever earn a penny?

I did: that once, and this was the way in which it happened.

I have said before that I was story-teller to my brothers and sister, and one particular story grew to be a favourite with them; I repeated it so often that at last I wrote it down. It used to make Susie cry! Ned said "Rubbish!" every time I came to the end of it, but I have seen his eye twinkle to keep away tears, and Roger, whose opinion was valuable, always thought it the best I ever invented. It was all about a poor forsaken little beggar—a very sentimental tale indeed, written at a time when my head was full of some of Mr Charles Dickens' pathetic stories. The child

died of course, and I should have been very disappointed if Susie had *not* cried. My mother read the tale one day; that *was* a triumph. But she said nothing whatsoever about it, good, bad, or indifferent! I waited for a compliment: none came! In vain I led to the subject as I hung about the sofa, I could not elicit a remark of any kind relating to my authorship.

In the afternoon I was to drive with her. Such a pretty little phaeton she drove in those days—not the old pony carriage, but a showy phaeton with a pair of ponies, one grey and one black, which papa had lately given her. Whoever was chosen as my mother's companion in her drive was of course very proud of the honour, and as we drove off I ensconced myself in the cushions beside her with a great deal of pleasure. We had not gone far before we met a little beggar boy—a hardy, impudent little tramp, I have no doubt he was, but he put on a pitiful face, the wind was keen, and he was barefooted. Now it was one of the family principles never to give to tramps, and it is a very wise principle, and one of my own to

this day ; so my mother, who gave, it is true, with a lavish hand, but with a wise charity took trouble to find fit recipients for her gifts, drove on unheeding. But we had hardly passed the boy, when to my surprise she pulled up and said—yes, positively *this* was what my dear mother said,

“ No ; really I can’t pass him *after reading your story this morning* ; ” and the ponies stood still while she found a penny, which she gave me and told me I might give it to the boy if I liked.

This remarkable penny was a copper one ; at that time the bronze ones were not coined, we had only heavy clumsy copper pence that made our hands dirty if we played much with them, and which we had a prejudice against keeping amongst our silver for fear they should dirty that too. But this particular copper penny was like none other—it was a glorious penny—I had *earned it*. I never felt so proud before—and have I ever felt so proud since ? I doubt it. For the rest of the drive I sat in my corner, red with pleasure, complacently smiling, and I smile complacently to this day whenever I think of it.

How well I remember that bright afternoon—a “pet day,” such as one so often enjoys during the winter in this much-maligned climate of ours. The blue sea sparkling in the sunshine—we were staying in the Isle of Thanet at the time—the clear, pure air—the sound of the ponies’ quick feet beating the ground—the easy motion of the carriage on the level road—even a certain dark blue velvet cloak which my mother wore for the first time that day—all come back to me.

Talking of that cloak, I have half a mind to write its history! When it had ceased to be new, it was discovered to possess vast capabilities for our “acting wardrobe,” and was frequently borrowed to appear upon the stage. Upon one occasion when a king was to fall dead—I forget in what piece—the monarch and an oil lamp unfortunately went down together, and as the dead man scorned to rise, or to give any signs of life, but lay “weltering in his gore,” every one thought that the velvet cloak, just then doing duty as royal robes, was done for out and out. But it survived even that, though for some time after it only hung in

the hall at every one's service in wet weather for a run across the lawn, or as an extra wrap in the pony carriage. Later, for old acquaintance' sake, I begged it, sent it to a dyer and cleaner, and actually wore it once more in renovated splendour. But about that time *grandchildren* began to run in and out of the old house where Sue and I had passed our childhood, and the soft blue folds were more often wrapped round some one else than myself—a very tiny some one, who peeped sleepily out of the velvet as she lay nestled in my arms. In due course that little "some one" began to trot about with the other children, and the dear old cloak, cut down and re-lined, trotted about too on her shoulders. But one day I saw the last of it. A child came begging to the door, a tiny eight-year-old tramp, who (against our principles!) went away not only with pennies, but with the faded, shabby, though still warm cloak over her tattered frock and surmounting her little bare feet. Perhaps I thought it a fit ending for the fine blue driving-cloak, which took its first airing in my mother's phaeton on the day, so long ago now, that

I earned a glorious penny for that other little tramp.

But it is a sixpenny piece with a hole in it that tells a story to me. It was wonderful how far we made sixpence go in those days ; and you must please to remember that Sue and I had a family to provide for—seven dolls to clothe and supply with furniture, dinner services, books, everything but food—luckily for us they did not eat. All down my old account-book these items—“red ribbon, twopence”—“muslin, fourpence”—recur again and again ; here and there is the word “goodies,” and hardly a page without “picture to paint” occurring at least once ; but more money seems to have gone in muslin and ribbon than in other things, and it was all for my daughters. Now and then came a forfeit, but not often. Mamma was merciful ; we were supposed to pay a fine of one penny for leaving our things about, and for sundry other bad habits ; but I remember mamma saying once to Aunt Lydia, who was grumbling that the fine was not exacted when she had sat down on my knitting-pins, which I had carelessly

left in an arm-chair, nearly fallen over a whole entanglement of twine, the property of poor Ned, but which was found lying in the drawing-room doorway, and been shocked at the sight of Susie's garden-hat on the sofa—

“Consider that a penny is a sixth part of their whole weekly income, Lydia. I don't inflict a fine if I can help it.”

“I wonder you can help it now,” said our aunt. *She* would have fined us all round a dozen times a-day, and given us half-crowns at bedtime to make up!

One Saturday morning—a fine July day it was, and holiday time—as Sue and I were on our way to mamma's boudoir to receive our allowance, Ned met us on the stairs. He had his own sixpence in his hand, and was tossing it in the air and catching it as it fell; but he looked very gloomy—evidently Ned was in trouble of some kind or other. A sudden thought seemed to strike him at sight of us and our account-books.

“O Gracie!” he exclaimed, “I want to speak to

you a moment. Run away, Sue—I don't want you to hear."

Sue ran away, but when she was gone Ned appeared to have nothing to say; he stood on the stairs tossing his sixpence higher and higher, till at last he tossed it *too* high, missed it as it fell, and it was hidden in the silky scarlet mat at the foot of the stairs. We both ran down to look for it.

"But what did you want me for?" I asked, as we groped in the mat.

"You're so jolly good-natured," he began. "I want you to do something for me—to help me."

"How?"

"Well, the truth is—— How much money have you got, Gracie?"

"None; at least only the sixpence for to-day."

"Whew!" Ned sat down on the mat and whistled.

"How much do you want me to lend you?" I asked.

Ned looked round to see if any one was near, then put his face close to mine, and whispered—

"Grace, I say, what do you think? I owe Fitch eighteenpence! *Don't tell mamma.*"

Now, as a rule, we all told mamma everything, and I do believe this was the first time such words had ever been said by any of us; moreover debt was strictly forbidden, so you may imagine that I felt very uncomfortable at this speech. I was silent.

"Does Roger know?" I at length asked.

"If you tell Roger or any one else, I'll"—
What he would do he did not say, for at that moment he caught sight of his lost piece of money.

"Don't be angry, Ned," I said coaxingly. "You can have my sixpence, and of course Sue will lend you her's, and then there's your own"—

"Goosey! don't you remember I'm to go to-day with mamma to buy the Testament I promised to give Jim Blake?"

Jim was the son of one of the men employed in the garden; his mother had been at one time Ned's nurse, and the two boys were of an age. Jim was starting in life as foot-boy to the village

doctor, at an age when Ned was still a child, and it had been Ned's own proposal to contribute to his outfit. As *he* very seldom had any "cash in hand" at all, but found that his usual weekly expenses consumed the whole of his weekly income, it had been agreed between mamma and himself that he should pay half the price of a New Testament for Jim, and should write his name in it.

"But you *can't* buy it now," remarked I.

"Why not? I'll tell you what you must do—ask mamma to advance you one week's money; then you 'll have a shilling, and Sue's sixpence will do the rest."

It did not strike me that this was a selfish proposal; to owe eighteenpence and to have a secret from mamma was such a terrible state of things, that I had not room in my mind to think of anything except how best to help Ned out of such a dreadful scrape. I did not ask why he had not applied to his elder brother; I knew in my heart, just as well as Ned did, that Roger would have paid the debt at once (he had a whole shilling a week, and was a millionnaire in our eyes); but he

LIMITED INCOMES.

would have done so only on condition that Ned confessed to mamma at once, and submitted manfully to the penalty of his disobedience to the rule. Ned was older than I was—I had not courage to make the same condition.

“Come, Gracie!” Sue’s merry voice was heard calling from above; “mamma is busy—she says you must come at once or not at all—and oh, my sixpence has a hole in it! Isn’t that nice?”

“Why should it be nice?” shouted Ned.

“Luck!” shouted Susie in return. “Nurse says it’s ever so lucky.”

“I’ll try,” I whispered to Ned as I ran upstairs.

We were not *obliged* to keep accounts, but mamma was always pleased to see the books; she said it made us methodical to write down all we spent, and that it was a good habit, and Sue and I did so with tolerable regularity. As mamma looked over the pages of my book, I summoned courage to say—

“Would you mind giving me two weeks’ allowance to-day, mamma, and none next Saturday?”

“Yes, I should mind it very much. What is this

word, Gracie? Your writing really gets worse and worse, my child."

I looked over her shoulder.

"‘Goodies’—‘beggar,’" I read. "Oh, *that’s* ‘shrimps;’ a man came to the door, and the maids were buying some for tea, so Sue and I gave the dolls a treat."

"How many did you get for a farthing?" said mamma smiling.

"Nine, we counted them. Mamma dear, *why* would you ‘mind’?"

My mother understood the question to refer to the matter of the allowance in advance, but she did not answer it, she only just glanced at me for a moment, she seldom did answer a question that began with "why."

"I must say you manage your incomes well, Susie and you," she said laughing, as she gave back the book. "If it was only neatly written, dear, I should be very pleased indeed. Here is your sixpence."

I took it, and returned to Ned. I found 'him under the chesnut-tree in our own garden.

“ Well ? ” he began, as I drew near ; “ have you got it—the shilling, I mean ? ”

I shook my head and told him how it was, and tried to persuade him to pay his debt to Fitch with the three available sixpences, and give up the idea of buying Jim’s book.

“ And so let mamma know all about it ! Girls *are* muffs ! ”

“ But why shouldn’t she know ? ”

“ Because I don’t choose she should ! ” growled Ned, who had thrown himself face downwards on the grass, and was very cross indeed. “ Just you run to Fitch, and ask if he ’ll take a shilling and—and the dormouse back, and come here and tell me what he says.”

Fitch was an old man who worked about the grounds, and of whom the boys used to buy dormice, guinea-pigs, white-mice, pigeons, and all sorts of live creatures. He was not a favourite of mine. In the first place, he was bent nearly double—never able to straighten himself ; I thought the attitude convenient for weeding, which was his principal occupation, but I *did* wonder how he

managed to lie down at night. He had projecting teeth, and grey hair falling forward all over his face ; and when he turned his head sideways to hear what I had to say, he used to look so like a fierce old rat that I always felt inclined to turn and run away. He kept a collection of live stock, under the care of a certain yellow dog, in an unused garden shcd. This dog was none the less terrible to my imagination that I knew him to be toothless : he was intended to frighten the garden boys should any of them be dishonestly inclined with regard to pigeons or dormice ; I know he frightened me. I never went near the shed if I could help it, but being unsuccessful in my search for Fitch elsewhere, I was obliged to penetrate into his retreat. I did not like my errand. Ned was apt to repent of his barginas and send me to persuade Fitch to take back or change his purchases ; and sometimes the old man would be cross, and when Fitch was in a bad humour I was more afraid of him than even of his yellow dog. However, he was good-natured that day, and made no difficulties. He would be content

with the shilling, and he “knew of a person as wanted a ‘sleeper,’ so it was all right enough.”

Back I came to Ned, who cheered up amazingly, and we both went to find Sue and ask for her money. As it happened, we could not find her, and Ned paid Fitch with his sixpence and mine, knowing that we should see Sue at dinner, and he was not to drive with mamma till afterwards. Still Ned passed a very uncomfortable morning, and made me very uncomfortable too. He was in terror for fear any unforeseen accident should keep Roger and Sue, who had gone off somewhere together, out of the way until the carriage came round, so that he would have to start without the money after all. We moped about the grounds in a miserable sort of way till dinner-time.

Sue was only too glad to give her sixpence. We were all together in the hall when Ned asked for it; but Roger was teaching his dog to jump over a stick, and took no notice of what was going on; and when Ned whispered to Susie not to tell, her only thought was that

something for Roger was to be bought with the money, and she nodded her head in sign of secrecy.

I had fancied Ned would come back quite cheerful, but he did not. At tea Roger asked what ailed him, and afterwards, when Roger tried to persuade Ned to go out, the boy said he was tired and refused to stir.

“You’ve been up to mischief,” said Roger. “The sooner you speak out the better—what is it, lad?”

“What’s *what*? I wish you’d leave a fellow in peace. I’m tired, I tell you!”

Roger shrugged his shoulders and left the room. As soon as he was gone, Susie eagerly began—

“Did you give it him? May I know what it was?”

“What on earth are you talking about, child?”

“Why, the present for Roger. You told me not to tell, so I knew it was to be a surprise,” explained Sue.

“You knew!—you know a great deal, don’t you?” Then, as a sudden fear struck him, Ned

went on—"Mind, Susie, you're not to tell mamma you lent me sixpence."

"Oh, mamma?" said Sue, "it was her, was it?"

"What do you mean now, you incomprehensible monkey? What have you got into your head this time?"

"It was a present for mamma; well, I won't tell. When shall you give it her?"

Ned looked at me in dismay.

"Can't you make her understand?" he said. "The fact is, Sue, I paid a debt with your money, and I'm very much obliged to you, but if you say anything about it you'll get me into an awful scrape."

Susie looked very grave indeed; and then, little girl though she was, she did what I ought to have done—begged and prayed of Ned to tell mamma at once, and "get it over." He would not listen; and as she went on coaxing him to do what was right, he got up and was going away when she stopped him by the exclamation—

"But I've not promised, Ned, you know. I'm, oh! so sorry, but I've not promised."

"You little sneak!" Ned was too much surprised to say more.

"Mamma 'll ask what I did with my sixpence, because she knew what I was *going* to do. I had a plan, and if she asks I *must* tell."

"Tell away, only don't let out that you knew what I wanted it for."

"But if she asks? O Ned, dear old Ned, *do* tell! Ask him to tell, Grace."

"You can do that yourself, Miss Tell-tale," with which sarcasm Ned left the room.

Poor little Sue! she cried dreadfully over the thought of Ned's displeasure, and of what she might have to say to mamma by-and-by. But she need not have fretted ; her sixpence had told tales already! Mamma had recognised it at once when Ned paid for the Testament, and remembering my request for an advance and Ned's own gloomy looks, and noticing his confusion when she remarked that surely that was the sixpence with a hole in it that Susie had been so pleased with, she had redeemed it with one of her own, and after giving him several opportunities of telling her all about

it, had at last sent for and questioned him. When we went down to the drawing-room we found Ned there, looking—no longer cross, but very much ashamed of himself, and mamma held Sue's lucky sixpence in her hand.

"This is yours, little girl," she said ; "and, Grace, it would have been better to persuade poor Ned to do right, than to help him to conceal wrong : I am disappointed."

That was all Sue and I heard of the matter, except that, as we walked home from church the next day, I ventured to observe—

"Sue's sixpence was *unlucky*, not lucky, I think." Upon which Ned answered—

"It wasn't, then ! It made me tell ; and I 'm sure I 'm glad it 's over, though I *shall* have no money for all the rest of the holidays. It *was* a lucky sixpence, and Sue's a trump ! "

And this was how I first learnt that it is far better for little sisters to help brothers to do right, than to aid and abet them in wrong-doing. If the boys *do* growl, in their heart of hearts they think, as Ned did, that the girls who try to persuade them

to be true and brave are greater “trumps” than those who are “jolly good-natured” enough to help them to deceive.

I don’t often see a sixpence with a hole in it, they are not common; but whenever I do, it tells me this story.

CHAPTER VIII.

THIN BREAD-AND-BUTTER.

I DON'T suppose it tells *you* a story ; I don't suppose it says anything at all that you can understand, unless, indeed, you are hungry, and then of course it cries, "Come, eat me," as bread-and-butter, both thick and thin, does to all hungry boys and girls. You see you are young still, and it's not till one grows beyond childhood that the common everyday things about one take to telling stories.

Thin bread-and-butter—*very* thin, that is, and with plenty of butter—always speaks to me of Miss Mixon and a certain summer which we spent at the seaside.

Whenever the whole family went away together, "nurse" went too. It was the only drawback to our felicity, for at the time I am now thinking of,

we had pretty well outgrown her jurisdiction at home, but in a hired house she was always in charge, and we never found her half as indulgent as Mrs Parsons, the housekeeper, used to be in matter of provisions for an expedition or a picnic, to say nothing of impromptu dolls' feasts. Even with regard to our ordinary meals we used to think her dreadfully stingy and particular. She actually objected to our eating the lumps of sugar! just as if we were still nursery children ; and would hardly ever allow sugared bread-and-butter, which really is one of the comforts of life. But the worst of all was the butter. We had a dairy at home, and revelled in fresh butter, cream, and new milk, and the price asked for all these commodities at a watering-place in the height of the season was a standing grievance to nurse. She hardly allowed us any butter at all ; bread and scrape it was, and oh, such thick slices! Happy the child who found holes in its slice ! they were looked upon as butter mines, and highly valued. The precious little lumps were dug out carefully, and then respread upon the surface of the bread. Sometimes, if Sue

was lucky and had nice big holes, she would share their contents with Ned. I don't think any of the rest of us were generous enough to give away butter. We complained to mamma once, but she only laughed at us for our pains. It would do us good, she said, to suffer a little hardship, it would hurt us much less to have to eat bread and scrape, than it would hurt poor nurse's feelings to be interfered with. She was a valuable servant, and it was a great comfort to have some one so entirely to be trusted. Mamma was not very strong that year—indeed, it was for her health that we had come to the sea; yet I am afraid we could not entirely agree with her, and felt a little cross that our wrongs were not redressed.

But to return to Miss Mixon. She was a maiden lady, and lived two doors off in the same row of houses as ourselves. Our parents had known her before, but this was our first introduction to her. One day mamma desired Susie and me to put ourselves tidy—a very necessary preparation for a visit, for we were out all day playing on the sands, • and you know what that means—and be ready to

go with her at four o'clock. Roger and Ned were to be ready also.

“Miss Mixon wants to see you *all*,” said mamma ; but added, for the comfort of the boys, that they need only just make their bows, and then run off to the rocks, for it would be low water at four that day, and they had planned to go after sea-anemones.

When the time came to start, Roger’s Latin exercise was not finished ; and after a little debating of the matter, it was settled that he should join us in Miss Mixon’s drawing-room as soon as he could, and that Ned should remain with us until his brother came, when they could both go off together.

It was a very warm afternoon. The red flags on the little side-walk opposite our door were quite hot to the feet, and the sea dazzled us if we turned our heads that way, while the wide expanse of cool, brown, shining sand lying between us and it looked more tempting than ever. We grudged “wasting a day,” as we called it, for since we *were* tidied up for our visit, we were condemned to go .

on the Parade afterwards and listen to the band. It was supposed to be a treat, and we were just sufficiently grateful for the kind thought of us and our pleasure, not to confess that it was no treat at all but a great penance, to walk up and down and listen to the music, knowing that Roger and Ned were running barefoot on the rocks all the time, and revelling in sand and sea-water. As we had been dabbling and paddling to our heart's content all the morning and all day long the day before—the *week* before, for that matter—I suppose it was only natural that mamma should think a little change would be agreeable. Fortunately it was not a long walk to No. 9, only three doors to pass before Susie pulled the bell, and a rosy-cheeked little maid-servant ushered us into Miss Mixon's cool sitting-room. The green venetian blinds were down, but the windows stood wide open; and we thought the room a very pleasant one, for it was full of old china and strange-looking Indian figures, interspersed with the most wonderful shell ornaments I ever saw, and there was actually a large French *bonbonnière* standing open on the table, out

of which Miss Mixon bade us help ourselves as soon as we had shaken hands with her and she had made the usual remark of all strangers—how like his father Ned was—and had kissed Susie—people always *did* want to kiss Susie.

Ned nudged my elbow as we stood by the table, each with a chocolate bonbon in our mouths, to call my attention to the fact that there was a balcony to the room. It was a great grievance that there was none at No. 5. The first six houses in the row were old-fashioned and built long ago; they had only sash-windows, and we had often envied the French windows of the rest of the terrace, and the green-painted iron balcony on to which they opened.

“It’s a shame!” whispered Ned. “Why didn’t mamma take No. 7?”

“Couldn’t get it, I suppose,” answered I; for of course mamma would never have hired a house *without* a balcony, if there had been another *with* one to be had—or so we thought. “I wonder if we might go and look at those shell things?”

We did not quite know what to do when we had finished our bonbons. Mamma and Miss Mixon were talking together, and it was not very amusing to stand still and listen to them ; but presently the good lady remembered us, and getting up from her seat on the sofa, she politely begged mamma to rise too.

“ Because you see, dear, there was nowhere else to put her—Jessie, I mean—and if you wouldn’t mind sitting in the arm-chair instead, I’m sure my little visitors would be interested.”

Mamma seemed rather at a loss to understand how her change of seat could be “ interesting ” to us, and got up with a puzzled expression to do as she was asked ; upon which Miss Mixon proceeded to pull off the sofa cushions and then the long soft mattress. We children privately thought she was mad, but soon Susie and I changed our opinion, and considered her the very best and kindest of maiden ladies, for she took hold of a loop of braid attached to the seat of the sofa, raised it like a lid, and called to us to look in. A most magnificent doll lay there, smiling up at us from a most

magnificent wardrobe, for it was lying upon its own clothes, all neatly folded.

“It was my last, my dears, and I’ve a regard for her—I may say, a very great regard. It is not every one that I would allow to touch her, but your mother’s children may have the best I have to offer. You may even play with Jessie; I couldn’t do more for the Queen herself.”

I may have my doubts now as to whether the Queen would care to play with Jessie; but we did not doubt it then, as we lifted out the beautiful smiling creature and softly kissed her waxen cheeks. We fully appreciated the honour done us, and as for Miss Mixon herself, naturally we thought there must be something very estimable about a grown-up person who owned to a “great regard” for a doll. We thoroughly enjoyed the half-hour that followed—that is to say, Susie and I did; of course it was dull for poor Ned, who by-and-by slipped behind the venetian blinds and went on to the balcony.

Jessie’s clothes were lovely, made of costly materials, silk and satin dresses, fine cambric linen,

and I especially remember a very gorgeous crimson velvet pelisse, also an evening frock of India muslin, but then how queerly made they were ! It was a long time—a *very* long time we thought, as we took shy glances at Miss Mixon, and noted her spectacles, her false front, her cap—since that lady could have had even her *last* doll, and decidedly its wardrobe *was* very old-fashioned, and very unlike that of our own children.

“I *should* like to make her an honest cotton frock,” said Susie softly. “Poor dear, she can’t be comfortable in such finery, and only look at the scanty skirts !”

“So you shall, dear,” said Miss Mixon, who had overheard the remark. “Make her anything you please, come and see her whenever you like; in fact,” she added, turning to mamma, “I wish you would let them run in and out as they please—without formality, you know. I love children dearly, and *your* children, Ellen”— Miss Mixon finished her speech with a sigh; and we were very much struck by hearing her call our mother by her

Christian name, and thought they must be very great friends indeed.

Mamma began to wonder where Roger was ; he did not seem to have had much to do, and she thought he would have joined us before now. Just as she was saying so, there came a ring at the door—the principal entrance opening on to the street, not the garden-door facing the sea, by which we—in virtue, I suppose, of mamma's old friendship—had been admitted.

“This will be him,” said Miss Mixon. But it was not Roger. Three ladies were shown in by the blushing Phœbe, who evidently was not used to visitors, and threw open the drawing-room door with an “Oh, please, ma'am !” which seemed to us an odd way of announcing guests. The three ladies appeared quite to fill the room, and Miss Mixon was nervous and fidgetty, owing to there being no seats for them. Seeing this, while she fussily greeted her friends and fussily introduced them to mamma, Susie and I, unbidden, replaced Jessie in the inside of the sofa, put back the

mattress and pillows, and made all straight in no time. Our hostess was quite pleased.

"Thank you, my dears," she said. "So thoughtful, and so quick and handy," and in her gratitude she gave us more chocolate bonbons.

Before Miss Mixon's cheeks had cooled, and before the conversation with the new comers had got beyond the weather, there came another ring at the bell, and a tall military-looking gentleman was shown in.

But Roger must have arrived at the same moment, for he followed the gentleman into the room, and at a sign from mamma, only just shook hands with Miss Mixon, and went away again almost immediately, for glancing round and seeing no signs of Ned, he jumped to the conclusion that his brother had grown tired of waiting, and had gone off to the rocks by himself. Mamma only delayed her departure till Miss Mixon's fluttered spirits had recovered themselves enough to allow her to take her leave, and as soon as she could, she said good-bye, and beckoned to us to follow her. We had all forgotten Ned, or rather

Roger fancied he was gone because he did not see him ; mamma fancied both boys had left together, and Susie and I had been so occupied with Jessie that we really had not noticed his going out of the window nearly twenty minutes before. We did not leave the house by the garden entrance, for Phœbe was waiting to let us out at the other door, and as we went straight to the Parade we thought no more about the boys. Meantime, where *was* Master Ned ? He related his adventures by-and-by, and a hearty laugh we had over them.

When first he had slipped into the balcony he felt very cross and discontented ; for though the tide was far, far out, and the sand lay moist and brown beyond the pier, and the black rocks were all uncovered, yet the tide had turned, and to the impatient boy it seemed that more and more of the rocks were covered every moment. Now and then he peeped into the room, and there were mamma and Miss Mixon still talking as eagerly as ever, and Susie with Jessie on her lap, while I knelt by the sofa very busy with the fine garments it contained. Then he hung over the rail of the

balcony as far as ever he could, without falling over altogether, or varied his amusements by pacing up and down like the animals in their dens at the Zoological, till at last a bright idea struck him, and he began to fish. After that time did not hang so heavy ; indeed, so engrossed did he become, that the visitors came and went, mamma took her leave, even the military-looking gentleman went away, and all unknown to Ned !

You will wonder what sort of fishing his was. There were two windows to the room, one just over the garden entrance, the other over the parlour window ; but *below* the parlour window was another opening on to a sort of deep square hole—a thing that would have been an area if it could, but as it did not run the length of the house, but only before that one kitchen window, it really was nothing else but a paved hole, its use, of course, being to give light and air to the underground room. Now, in this morsel of an area had accumulated a fascinating heap of rubbish—an old soda-water bottle or two, corks innumerable, dead leaves, empty lucifer • match-boxes, cotton reels, and things of that sort,

and in Ned's pockets, naturally, there was string, twisted bits of wire, crooked pins—the kind of articles that every one knows *do* live in boys' pockets. A line was soon fitted up, and the angling began.

It must have been very exciting! The corks were so hard to catch—Ned described all this to us afterwards, you know, and gave a very graphic picture of how the corks bobbed about—even the cotton reels came up more easily, and the empty match-boxes were no trouble at all. In time he had landed a fine heap of small "fish," and then tried for a soda-water bottle. That *was* an undertaking! but Ned's patience held out. Bruce's spider was nothing to him. Fourteen times did he successfully noose the bottle, and raise it an inch or so from the ground, and fourteen times did it effect its escape and fall down again. But at last, what with bent wire and pins and a cradle of twine, this monster fish was actually brought to land! Slowly and carefully and trembling with excitement Ned hauled in his line; anxiously did he watch as the treasure swung at the end of it, and

as soon as ever he could he leaned over the balcony, grasped the bottle triumphantly, and crowned therewith his heap of rubbish ! Then he stood up and looked about him.

Why, the rocks were half covered ! the tide was coming in fast—already there was no more sand to be seen beyond the pier !—the shadows were long, too, and altogether there was an unmistakeable five-o'clock look about the afternoon which startled him. Where could Roger be ? Ned turned towards the still-drawn venetian blinds, and peeped into the drawing-room. No one was visible ! There was only the top of Miss Mixon's cap to be seen, as the good lady, tired out with so much company, lay back in her arm-chair, enjoying a comfortable nap. Ned felt sure she was asleep, though he could not see her face, so he crept quietly into the room and crossed it to go away, but when he got half-way to the door, he remembered the heap of unsightly objects he had landed in the balcony, and thought it might be as well to creep quietly back again and restore his fish to their proper element. Perhaps also the slight noise

which he hardly could avoid making, might wake the sleeping lady ; he wished it might, for he did not quite like stealing away without saying good-bye. While he thought of all this, Ned stood looking at Miss Mixon. She was very fast asleep indeed. She had taken off her spectacles, and they lay on her lap, her head was thrown back against the top of the chair she sat in, her eyes were tight shut, but her mouth was open, and every now and then there was a queer noise heard. Ned *thought* it was a snore, but as one day, when we skilfully led up to the subject, Miss Mixon told us that ladies *never* snored, only gentlemen, of course it could not have been anything of the kind. Ned recrossed the room, and stepped back again into the balcony. The venetian blinds knocked against the window, but the gentle tapping did not disturb the sleeper. Perhaps the fall of the "fish" might awaken her. The match-boxes were light, and went down noiselessly ; the corks were almost as noiseless ; but the cotton reels made a little sound as they fell, and Ned peeped at the cap to see if it had moved. No, the red bow still

rested motionless against the top of the high-backed chair. And now came the turn of the soda-water bottle. Ned began to feel mischievous, and sent *that* down with all his force. The loud crash with which it fell and was shivered to pieces woke Miss Mixon at last, but he rather regretted his experiment; he had by no means been prepared for the effect it would have upon her. Suddenly startled from sleep, the poor lady staggered to her feet; her cap was all awry, and her spectacles fell to the floor. She vainly tried to collect her scattered senses, and make out what the noise was which she had heard; and owing to her confused, half-awake state of mind, at the first movement of the green blind, and the first sound of Ned's voice behind it, she screamed loudly—at least Ned used to say he supposed she *meant* it for a scream—but it was so very strange a sound that he let the blind fall at once, and retreated to conceal his laughter, for, being a polite boy, he knew it was not right to laugh in a lady's face, never mind what sort of a noise she made.

“Man!” exclaimed Miss Mixon firmly, but

edging near the bell, and, in so doing, stepping on her fallen glasses as she spoke; “what are you doing there?—go away at once!” Then in a softer, almost a cajoling tone, “My good man, for your own sake, let me beg you to go away quietly.”

That was just what Ned wished to do, but the instant he moved the blind again, Miss Mixon screamed as before.

“I am not alone in the house,” she cried. “I shall summon the—the *men-servants*, if you do not go away.”

Upon this Ned thought it better to come boldly forward, and try to explain matters as well as he could speak for laughter, but Miss Mixon was far too terrified to listen to explanations; she instantly ran at him with the poker; in her fright and hurry it had become entangled in the fine cut-paper ornament of her grate, which, waving like a flag between herself and Ned, must have intercepted her view of the “man”; otherwise the delusion could hardly have lasted a moment longer.

“Please, don’t,” cried Ned, choking with laughter,

behind the arm-chair where he had taken refuge. "It's only me. I'm so sorry I frightened you, ma'am."

"It's—a-boy," gasped Miss Mixon slowly, lowering her weapon, and trying hard to recover her dignity. "Little boy," she demanded sternly, emphasizing her words by pointing at him with the poker, "what do you mean by it?"

In spite of Ned's wonderful likeness to his father, she did not recognise him till he explained, and as soon as she *did* understand the state of the case, she was so dreadfully afraid she had made herself ridiculous, that he had hard work to console her. In her agitation she could scarcely be persuaded to relinquish the poker, she seemed to cling to it as a support under these trying circumstances, and though she did divest it of the banner, it was only to try and put the grate ornament upon her head, in place of the cap which had fallen off altogether. It was not till Ned had gently taken the red and white paper from her, and was on his knees rearranging it in the fire-place, that she came slowly to her senses. The broken glasses were a real

grievance, for it so happened that she had no others, and sorely did she lament over them.

“For I don’t believe I can write a letter without them, my dear, and I must write to town, you know, for another pair,” she said.

Ned won her heart by writing the letter for her there and then, and before he had finished it, the “men-servants,” that is to say, little Phœbe, came in with the tray, and Miss Mixon insisted upon keeping him to tea.

And now it was that Ned tasted thin bread-and-butter. He described it to us afterwards with enthusiasm; but we soon grew familiar with it for ourselves, for from that day, we spent quite as much of our time at number nine as we did at number five, and whenever we had tea there—which was just whenever we pleased, and, on an average, three times a week—we had thin bread-and-butter. There was never anything else to eat, but that was enough. Plateful after plateful of the delicate rolled slices did Phœbe furnish, and our kind friend watch us devour. We had confided our wrongs in the butter way to her sympathising

ear, and she gave us more pity than mamma had done ; we could not eat enough to please her.

How many happy afternoons we spent in that little sitting-room ! The boys "fished" to their hearts' content. Susie and I treated Jessie as a child of our own, but I am sorry to say she never got her cotton frock ; we found no time for needle-work ; between the sands and the pier, going out boating and taking donkey rides, we had more than enough to do. Mamma used to say she was very glad we had struck up such a friendship with "Tabitha," as it kept us within doors during the hot noon-tide hours. The first time she said it we were a little puzzled, and our thoughts turned towards cats, for we did not know that that was Miss Mixon's Christian name.

Towards the end of our stay at the seaside, we were joined by a cousin of ours who had been out-growing her strength, and required change of air. Mildred was no addition to our pleasure. She was very spoilt indeed ; and a spoilt child, at no time a pleasant companion, is worse still when out of health. Mildred was never content. If we went

out on donkeys, never mind how great pains we took to give her her choice, she always insisted upon changing donkeys with Susie or me before we had gone a mile, and once even made Roger have his saddle put upon the beast she had been riding, and her saddle upon his steed. On the sands it was always too hot or too cold to suit her; she took all our best treasures and gave us none of her own, and she *would* keep wet seaweed under her bed in spite of all nurse could say. As for the boats, it was soon found that it was simply dangerous to take Mildred out, except with some one who could make her obey, and as the only person who could do that was mamma, boating was stopped altogether unless she went with us. We had been told to give up to our poor little spoilt cousin, and do our best to amuse her, and one wet afternoon, the third day of her visit, we resolved to take her to see Miss Mixon. It was at tea-time that the bright idea struck us. Mildred was more indignant at nurse's stinginess with regard to butter than even we were, but when Ned found a really splendid butter mine in his slice of bread-and-

scrape, and digging out quite a respectable lump, heroically offered it to her, she called him a "nasty boy," and began to cry.

"I'll tell you what," said Roger, "we'll spend to-morrow afternoon with Miss Mixon."

"Oh, yes," cried Susie, kissing Mildred's tears away. "You *will* like that; she's the dearest old maid."

"Old maids are horrid," said Milly ungraciously. "Why shall I like it? what do you do there?"

"There are curiosities to see—wonderful Indian figures," I began.

"*My* papa was in India," interrupted my cousin, "and he sent me lots of those figures—stupid things they are!"

Then we told her of Jessie, but she didn't care for dolls, unless they were her "very own," and at last I said, rather impatiently—

"Well, at all events, you'll get a first-rate tea, a *delicious* tea, and you'll like that."

"Yes, indeed," said Ned thoughtfully, examining his slice in hopes of another "mine." "No bread-and-scrape there, I can tell you."

Mildred brightened at this, and condescended to say she would go, and Susie, who though the youngest, was the neatest scribe amongst us, wrote a little note to warn our friend of our intentions.

We did not, in general, think it necessary to announce our coming beforehand, but as we were to bring a stranger this time, Miss Mixon was duly informed, in Susie's best hand, that we were coming to tea the following evening, and if it should be wet that we should spend the afternoon with her also.

It *was* wet; and after dinner we wrapped shawls and cloaks round us, and sending the boys on before to ring the bell, we girls ran through the rain after them to number nine.

At first our plan for Mildred's amusement did not promise to be very successful. She was in a worse humour than usual. I know it made me feel quite indignant to hear her say of everything we showed her, that she, or her mamma, or her aunt, had something "just like that—only prettier." But to our surprise, the boys' queer balcony fishing took her fancy, and as the balcony had a roof, they could

stand in shelter, and it was an additional charm, that the rubbish they landed came up dripping wet. When Mildred was called in to tea she looked quite radiant, and Sue and I were pleased, for we did not want her to show only her worst side to our kind friend. Imagine our dismay when, as the meal proceeded, we noticed a storm gathering. We knew the signs only too well. Frowns came down like a thundercloud over the brow, *we* could get no words from her at all, and to all our hostess' kind speeches she answered in sulky monosyllables. Moreover she would not eat. The first plate of bread-and-butter she had seemed to enjoy as much as we did, but declined having any of the second, and though she watched the door eagerly when Phœbe came in with the third, and the fourth, she would not touch another slice, and the cloudy brow grew darker and darker.

We were very glad to run away with her as soon as tea was over, so afraid were we of a scene which would shock Miss Mixon. It was still raining when we left. I threw a shawl over Mildred's head, Sue took her hand, and off we ran ; but on our own

door-step, where the boys were waiting for us, out it came. We learnt the reason of her sullen silence and her ill-tempered face.

"How *dare* you tell such fibs?" she cried, "you promised me a good tea—a 'delicious tea' you said, and there was nothing but bread-and-butter."

"Nothing but bread-and-butter?" faltered Sue.

"No; and you knew there wouldn't be. I saw you did; you weren't a bit surprised. I watched you, and you ate and ate and never left room for the good things, which you *would* have done if you hadn't *known* there was nothing else coming."

"Nothing but bread-and-butter!" echoed Ned, in amazement at her utter want of appreciation of a repast which, to our ideas, was a banquet worthy of the gods. "Well, but wasn't it THIN?"

CHAPTER IX.

OLD BOATS.

THE great sea waves breaking upon the shore, or dashing against the pier-head, tell stories to all, and a different one to every listener. I fancy they told rather mournful stories to our mother, as she sat watching them at the seaside place where we first met Miss Mixon, for papa was away, had been away for a long, long time, and more time still must pass before she could hope to see him again. I think even to you, if you listen attentively, the waves would have something to tell; but it is *old boats* drawn up upon a sandy beach, or anchored in the mud of some very quiet and sleepy harbour, that tell a tale to me. I never see such boats—weather-beaten, the paint all gone, and only tar now and then used upon the seams, bobbing about upon the water as the tide rises and they float, or lying

on the mud idle and dirty—without hearing from them the story of “our gentleman.” One day while playing on the rocks, Susie and I forgot all about the tide, and got caught by it: there was quite a broad strip of water between us and the firm sand, and of course the water was getting unpleasantly deeper every moment. I took off my shoes and stockings to wade to land, but Sue got nervous, and moreover did not like to sit on the wet, cold, slippery seaweed to take off hers. While we stood together laughing at our dilemma, and yet rather wishing that Roger and Ned would look our way, from the distant point where we could see them, up to their knees in the sea, and come to our aid, a gentleman walking on the sands stood still and looked at us. After he had looked a minute he spoke; he only said one word—

“Caught?”

“Yes,” said I laughing.

“Oh, please!” said poor Susie, though she did not explain herself further.

The gentleman now proceeded to take off *his* shoes and socks and to roll up his trousers, and

then came splashing into the water, quietly lifted Sue in his arms, and carried her to the dry sand.

Of course we thanked him very much, as he and I sat side by side, putting on our shoes and stockings again, and I told him how it was we had happened to get caught, and showed him no fewer than eleven shrimps which we had succeeded in taking in our miniature landing net. I told him they were for mamma's breakfast; but Sue was tender-hearted, she had the advantage over me and my bare feet, and, before my shoes were on; had thrown the little shrimps back into the sea; whereupon, when I had done scolding her, I informed the gentleman that Sue always *would* put back the live things we caught, though she was just as eager as we were in the catching. All this time the gentleman said not a word, and when he was ready he got up, nodded for "good-bye," and walked away along the sands. We were just preparing to go home when we saw him coming back again towards us, and stood still till he drew near. It was to Susie he wished to speak.

"I say." he began, and then stood silent so long

that Sue thought he was waiting for an answer to the remark, and said—

“Yes.”

“You had a donkey ride for nothing, hadn’t you now?” And with another nod “our gentleman” walked away again, and this time did not come back.

“What a funny man!” said I.

“We ought to have laughed,” said Sue, “I hope he wasn’t disappointed. Look, here come donkeys; it was that put it into his head, I suppose.”

We saw “our gentleman” every day after that, but he never talked again. Yet he seemed to like us. We always ran to meet him when he came upon the sands, and told him what luck we had had shrimping, or showed him the sea anemones we had found; if we were making a sand castle he took a spade, quite as a matter of course, and helped us; and what splendid castles “our gentleman” did make, to be sure!

One of our favourite amusements was sitting in an old boat, such as I have described, and waiting there till the tide was high, when Roger would row

us to the harbour steps. We delighted in feeling the lazy old thing turn from side to side gently, as if remonstrating with the sea that *wouldn't* let her alone, even in her old age, till at last whether she liked it or not she *had* to float, or if the tide was very high and the wind fresh, even to dance, stiffly and awkwardly, upon the sunny water, where the new fresh-painted boats were bobbing about gaily, and looking so scornfully at the poor old thing. It was greater fun still to sit in her when the tide was going *out* and feel her gradually subside into the mud. Roger made her his workshop, and carried his cork vessels there, while Sue and I rigged them. "Our gentleman" passed many an hour with us, helping in this work, which I must say, prospered better in his hands than in ours. Roger's boats even would not swim, and as to more ambitious craft with masts and sails, they were sad failures till our friend came to the rescue. It was in this old boat that he once spoke again, and by the way, it was to make another joke.

"Oh, isn't that better!" cried Ned, as a splendid little vessel was launched and sailed away tri-

umphantly, "I can't think why *yours* always do swim."

"Ours are very clumsy," said Roger, "yours are splendid, sir."

"More *ship shape*, aren't they now?" said "our gentleman," and this time we didn't forget to laugh.

That was a pleasant summer; we were sorry when the time came to go away, though the return home was something to look forward to. On the last morning of our stay, when we had exhausted all our usual amusements, when the tide had come up, and slowly undermined, and finally swept away, the most magnificent sand castle ever seen, when the rocks, where we had lingered as long as a rock remained, were all covered, when the white "sea horses"—the crested waves that had been racing round the pier-head, one after another—had got far past it, and were running up to the cliff's foot, tossing their silvery manes in despair that they could go no further, and the harbour was all astir with the lively motion of the anchored boats, we and "our gentleman" took our seats for the last

time in the battered old cockle-shell which we particularly affected. He was fashioning a little ship for Roger, better and prettier than any he had yet made, and as we watched him work, we chatted amongst ourselves as children will.

“When I’m a man,” said Ned, “I shall be a sailor.”

“You’ll have to begin before you’re a man,” said Roger, “boys go to sea at fourteen.”

“Well; that’s better than school. I shall go.”

“Mamma wouldn’t spare you,” this from Sue.

“And you know you are to be a farmer and have Broadmeads,” I observed.

“If I can’t go with leave, I shall go without,” Ned went on, “I shall run away.”

“No,” said “our gentleman,” and we all started to hear him speak, “No, no, no!”

Four “noes” were a good deal from him; he seemed quite inclined for conversation, but the effort he had already made must have exhausted the inclination, for he said no more until nearly an hour after, when we were climbing the steps at the pier-head in order to go home. We said

good-bye then, and told him we were going the next day, and thanked him for the little ships he had made and for all his kindness to us. To our amazement, he suddenly sat down on the low, broad, wooden parapet, and began to tell us a story. Only *began*; he couldn't do it, we were sure of that. He never got beyond the few first words.

"I'll tell you how *I* ran away to sea. Sit down."

We all did so obediently. There followed a dead silence, till Sue, gently touching his arm, said—

"Yes, sir; we *should* like to hear. Do go on."

"Oh! ah!" said "our gentleman." "When I was a boy"—but he could get no further. After another short silence he rose, and with his usual farewell nod, walked quickly away from us down the pier. We stood looking after him rather sorrowfully, but our regret changed to curiosity as we saw him turn and come towards us; we thought perhaps he was going to make another joke, but no, he had only suddenly realised that he should see us no more, and had come back to shake hands,

which he did warmly with each of us in turn. As he went again he looked over his shoulder, and spoke for the last time.

"I've not forgotten the story, you know," he said.

We wondered why he should tell us that. To know that *he* remembered it did not console *us* much for not hearing it at all; but the next morning we understood what he meant, for as we girls and mamma were seated in the coach, with the prospect of many a weary hour of dust, and heat, and uncomfortable crowding from fellow-passengers, between us and our journey's end, the head of "our gentleman" appeared at the window, and he dropped a folded paper into Susie's lap. It was the story! He couldn't *tell* it; of course he couldn't! but the dear, good man had taken the trouble to write it out for us. Sue and I read it first, and then passed it up to the boys, who had outside places, happy fellows! and when they had done, Sue and I read it again. It was as follows:—

MY HARDSHIPS AT SEA.

A good many years ago, when I was eleven years old, I ran away to sea, and although my hardships were not so great as might have been expected—not half as great indeed as I *had* expected—I don't advise any other boy of eleven to follow my example.

“I shall have to rough it terribly, but I am prepared for that,” I said to my friend and only confidant, Brown, as we conversed in whispers from our beds in the dormitory of Dr Whipemwell’s academy for young gentlemen. “I shall be ill-treated of course—they always do ill-treat cabin boys—but I’m prepared for that too,” and then we went over together every horror of ill-usage of which we had heard or read, so that at least my troubles would not come upon me unawares.

Three days after I ran away from school, and found my way to the sea, which was not far off; the booming of the waves as it sounded in my ears at night, chiming in with the books of adventure which I read all day, had inspired my wish to be a

sailor. I was considerably surprised that no one to whom I offered my services would accept them. Some of the rough men hanging about the little harbour were rude, but more often I only got laughed at for my pains. Night was coming on, and I determined to do as I had read of a boy doing in one of my favourite stories—hide on board, and be discovered during the voyage, when I thought I could work my passage out to wherever the vessel might be going.

I succeeded. I am not going to tell you *how*; I have no wish to set a bad example, or to smooth away difficulties for any little folks, in a path where the more difficulties they meet with, and the sooner they turn back, the better; suffice it that I *did* succeed in hiding myself on board a collier, and in getting undiscovered out to sea.

But oh! how miserable I was when I had done it. The water was tolerably smooth, but to my notions, the vessel pitched and rolled most disagreeably. How ill I felt! And then the coals! the close confinement of my lurking-place, the tarry smell of everything, and the “ill-treatment”

fast approaching! I heard the men's hoarse voices calling to each other, and their heavy footsteps on the deck. At last a step drew nearer than before, and the light from a lantern flashed upon my face. The moment had arrived; I tried to pick up a little spirit, and stumbled to my feet.

"Please, sir, let me work my passage out. I'll do anything; swab the decks, or cook, or—or"—

Feeling dreadfully sick, I tumbled down again, and sunk into a heap at the man's feet, wondering vaguely whether they would thrash me with a rope's end at once or wait a little first.

"Why, bless me!" said the man with the lantern, holding it down to examine me more closely. "Swab the decks? Here's a hinnocent! I never; that I didn't in all my born days!" saying which he set down the light, stooped to raise me in his arms (I was small of my age), and carrying me to a clear spot on the deck, seated me upon a heap of tarry rope, and stood contemplating me at his leisure.

"You be runned away, that's what you be," he said at last, shaking his head gravely.

I nodded, wondering at the same time how he

managed to stand so still and steady. Not that *anything* seemed really still to me, but everything was dipping, curtseying, rolling in the most extraordinary manner ; the mast was dodging about in the sky chasing the clouds, and just as it caught one, it bobbed down and let it go again, or else the cloud leaped up and so escaped.

My grimy friend, all black with coal-dust, had a kind face enough.

“And how do you suppose your mother feels to-night ?” he asked.

I shook my head, and pointed up to the sky above us with all its fleeting clouds.

The kind face brightened wonderfully.

“Not got no mother—leastwise, she be in heaven,” he exclaimed. “I might have knowed it ; I’m not so stupid but what I might have knowed it without telling. But,” and he looked grave again, “I’ve got young shavers of my own at home, and what would be my feelings if they was to cut and run? Did you think how your father would take it?”

Again I shook my head, this time more earnestly than before, again I pointed up.

He laughed out loud this time, he was so pleased.

“Not got no father, neither! might have knowed that too, I might. No good little chap never runned away from parents, and as for school-masters, I don’t think much of *them* myself.”

This he said by way of letting me down easy as it were; not at all because there is the slightest excuse for a boy who runs away from his master, or because he really thought there was, I am sure of that; but I had grown so sick and faint by this time, that I remember nothing more, until I found myself once again in the same rough kindly arms, but this time on dry land.

“What is it? where are you taking me?” I roused up to ask, and seeing I was awake, he set me down, and we trudged on side by side.

“I’m a taking of you back to school,” he said. “When you be a man, you see you can come aboard again; but bless you! not never in a collier! The quarter deck of a man-o’-war be the place for a spirity little chap like you.”

I didn’t feel a “spirity little chap” at all, as in the early dawn I stood shivering in the study, and

clung to that kind, hard hand, while my friend pleaded for me with Dr Whitemwell, and pleaded to such good purpose, that I was not punished as I really deserved, but forgiven, and put to bed, and otherwise comforted.

After all, when I grew to be a man, I did not become a sailor. I never felt the least wish to go to sea again; and although I got off so well, considering all things, I do *not* advise any eleven-year-old boy to run away from school, and hide on board a collier—and remember, I speak from experience, little folks.

CHAPTER X.

OUR HALF-HOLIDAY.

ONE morning, having shopping to do in Regent Street, I unfortunately mentioned that fact before my nephews and nieces. There instantly arose cries of “Take us with you!” from the boys, and of course the little girl echoed them, as she did everything her brother and cousin said.

“But, my dear boys, be reasonable! Tapes, cottons, silk dresses, sundry pairs of stockings, and a bonnet: how *can* all this interest you? You will be tired to death waiting for me, and bored to death into the bargain.”

“Ah, but—Cremer’s window; you’ll have to pass Cremer’s, and you’ll let us stop and look in.”

How well I knew what that meant! A cold, cruel, spring east wind was blowing—all the colder and more cruel because of the bright spring sunshine; but there I should have to stand, feeling

it go through and through my bones, until the children had made a mental inventory of every single article in Mr Cremer's fascinating window. The blue silk dolls—dear, dear! that I, of all people, should live to speak disrespcctfully of a doll—the dolls *dressed* in blue, I mean ; some dark, some light; some wearing Oxford, others Cambridge colours; some undecided dolls wearing *both*, for was it not the week of the boat-race? The fishes, big and little, with shining scales, each looking more natural than the other; for was not the first of April at hand, and would not every one want to buy *poissons d'Avril*? The mechanical poodle with a fiddle, the racing stables, the dinner-sets, the armour—in fact, *everything* would be critically examined, and, as it well deserved to be, “highly commended,” before a poor, weak-minded aunt, who can never resist spoiling children, either her own or other people's, could dare suggest that dinner-time was drawing near, and that it was a long way home. I had gone through it often enough in hot summer weather, oftener still at Christmas time, but I did *not* look forward to it with pleasure in an east wind.

They had their way, of course; and I was very much surprised to find my eldest nephew, not only quite competent to act as showman to his cousins, but able also to tell them the *price* of nearly all they saw! I confess, this astonished me not a little, until I heard the explanation. It seems he had been inside with his papa only two days before, and possessing on that occasion sixpence of his own, had of course inquired the price of all the handsomest and most expensive toys before investing it in the purchase of a pen-wiper with a little pug-dog in brown cloth sitting on the top of it, which valuable acquisition, I am sorry to say, he lost on his way home. For some time I was almost as much amused as the children—I *do* love a toy shop—but at last I began to fidget. My first suggestion as to setting off home was met by the audacious proposal, on the part of the boys, that we should stop till ten minutes to dinner-time, and then hail a hansom! This proposal I firmly rejected, and tried to wait in patience for the “five minutes more,” which had already extended to fifteen; and as I waited, a friend passed, a shaggy

friend, whose coat was rough, and whose big tail knocked against me as he pushed by, slowly wagging it in a state of sober pleasure, and who raised an honest, loving pair of eyes to my face, and forthwith told me a story, to keep me quiet. Only a Newfoundland dog following his master: this was the tale he told.

We were strictly forbidden to take Nep out with us. I hope that was not the very reason we did take him! He was a big, rough dog of my father's. My father had only lately returned to us, after so long an absence, that he himself was almost as much a stranger to his children as Nep was, but we loved him dearly.

For some reason or other, my father was very much attached to this dog. "You can hardly tell," he used to say, "how much I should grieve if harm came to dear old Nep."

Then he would make the faithful creature go through his tricks, always finishing off, to our great delight, by setting him on guard over some lesson-book to which we had a particular objection. It was in vain for our governess, or for any one else

but my father himself, to try and get possession of the book when once it had been put in Nep's charge ; he was the most trusty guard I ever knew.

There were two reasons why we should not take Nep out. The first was, that being a stranger in his new home, he might get lost or stolen ; the second, that owing to several cases of hydrophobia which had occurred lately in the neighbourhood, and the threats which had in consequence gone forth against all unmuzzled dogs, he might get shot. It was on the first Saturday after our father's return that we disobeyed.

Our Saturday afternoons were times of unlimited freedom—we might go where we liked, do what we pleased ; and this particular half-holiday saw us bound for the canal, on which a boat was kept for our amusement. Roger and Ned rowed ; Sue and I sat in perfect content with the dog lying in the bottom of the boat at our feet. How *could* he get stolen or shot if we kept him with us there, and were careful not to let him land by himself ? So we argued, as, stifling the voice of conscience, we floated on between green banks crowned with .

wreaths of wild roses, past stunted willows, past meadows where hay-making was in progress—four disobedient children, and one faithful dog.

On our half-holiday expeditions, although I never remember feeling hungry, we always considered it necessary to carry provisions, encumbering ourselves with burdens often terribly in the way ; and this time it was in one of the hay-fields that we landed to refresh ourselves with the contents of “mother’s basket.”

“Take care of it,” mamma had said as she gave it me,—“Take care of it, Gracie ; you children have destroyed or mislaid every other basket about the place, and I should be sorry to lose this ; I had it before Roger was born.”

It was well stored—cake, bread-and-cheese, a bottle of milk, and a paper of gingerbread-nuts being the chief contents. Seated on great heaps of sweet-scented new-mown hay, we shared this repast, told stories, played, and loitered until Roger pronounced it time to proceed on our way. Of course, we were not simply rowing up the canal : in imagination we were members of an exploring

party travelling through an unknown country, and we stepped into the boat full of our play, and thinking of nothing else. At the last moment some one suggested that we should be more comfortable without the basket, and might as well call for it as we came back. Ned pretended to see wild Indians lurking amongst the alder-bushes on the banks ; Sue described birds of gorgeous plumage flitting from branch to branch in the trees ; Roger had a desperate encounter with an alligator. Altogether, it was a most successful half-holiday, and we went further up the canal than we had ever been before, until—just at the moment when we were most eager, just when our perils and adventures had grown most exciting—there came upon us all at once a sudden recollection of Nep ! Where was he ? I forget which of us was the first to remember that the dog had not been seen since our halt in the hay-field !

We looked at each other in speechless dismay. Then Roger stood up in the boat and whistled and called loudly. No response. The cows feeding by the water-side raised their heads to stare—that was

all ; no Nep answered to his shouts. There was nothing for it but to return and row sorrowfully home. Besides being really distressed about the dog, we were very much alarmed about ourselves ; for, just because we enjoyed so much freedom, the few orders given us were considered doubly binding. It was never known in our home that disobedience went unpunished.

Melancholy silence fell upon our hitherto noisy party. No sound was heard but the splash of the oars, and the sobs of tender-hearted little Sue.

“ Perhaps he’s lying dead and shot,” she cried ; adding, with a fresh burst of sorrow, “ Papa said he would *grieve* if harm came to Nep ! ”

It was six o’clock when we set off homewards. Evening was closing in before we caught sight of the boat-house ; and so occupied had our minds been with vain regrets, that we only then remembered mother’s basket. Roger turned the boat round at once. There was a great outcry—we were so tired ! —it would be dark before we got home ! —what did the basket matter, when so much greater a

fault had been committed? one would be forgotten in the other.

Ned was heard to mutter—

“As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. We are ‘in’ for a scolding as it is, and my arms ache with rowing.”

So did Roger’s arms ache, but he was firm.

“Better one fault than two,” said he. “We have done wrong this afternoon, let us make up for it as far as we can by doing right now. I don’t see that it would mend matters much to lose mother’s basket because we have already lost father’s dog.”

So back we went, retracing with heavy hearts the way that had been so pleasant in the sunshine. The boat was pulled up under the willows, and Ned leaped on shore. But what was it that we heard? A short, sharp bark greeted him!

“O girls, girls! Roger, just see here! O good, faithful, patient, honest Nep!”

For there he was. Considering it his duty to watch the forsaken basket, not once through all the sunny hours, not once when evening shades began to fall, had Nep been tempted to desert his post.

It was as a punishment for our disobedience that day that my father never told us why he was so fond of Nep. We knew there *was* a story—and oh! how we longed to hear it, but he never told it us, and to this day I do not know Nep's history. I think the punishment was well chosen, for we could hardly look at the dear old dog without remembering our fault, and without making good resolutions for the future.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHITE VIOLETS' STORY.

OUR white violets grew amongst nettles, under a low hedge just opposite the garden gate. They were such fine ones, I don't think I ever saw such large, fair blossoms ; and to this day it hardly seems right to me that white violets should be found *without* nettles. Then the stalks were so long, probably because the violets had to push up through the shadowing nettle-leaves before they could see the light ; and they could be made up into such lovely bouquets. Every spring, Sue and I dressed up as flower-girls on May-day, and sold bouquets to papa and mamma for kisses. But strange to say, the story white violets tell me is not one of low thorn-hedges with nettles growing underneath, or of May-days in the country, but of a hot London schoolroom, at the very top of a high London house, of a French governess in a brown

silk gown, of schoolroom girls in holland pinafores, and of one patient little friend of ours, always lying on a sofa, and always with violets on the little table at her side. Not but what the story goes back again at the end, back to the thorn-hedge and the nettles. But the violets that tell this tale are white ones ; the blue ones, with no scent at all, that come crowding out upon high green banks covered with primroses, tell me nothing ; neither do the sweet purple ones, at least nothing besides the stories of springs past, and little whispered prophecies of springs to come, which they tell to every one else.

Christmas was over, the boys were gone back to school ; Sue and I had written out a new table of lessons and hours, which we did after every holiday-time, and were ready to show it to mamma, who, if she approved, would sign it, and after that the rules were considered strictly binding, until the boys came home at Easter or midsummer, when the paper was torn up joyfully on the first day of the holidays. We were only undecided as to whether there should be three German days and

two French days in the week, or *vice versa*. Sue had only just begun German, and was very eager about it; but then, at our last examination, I had been dreadfully mortified at papa's astonishment to find me more backward in French than he expected, and I was therefore in favour of three French days. Saturday mornings were devoted to arithmetic, but the rest of the day was always free, so that we had only five days for the other lessons. At last we decided to leave the point to mamma, and went down together to the drawing-room to submit our paper for her judgment. We were sorry to see the carriage from Yellowfields at the door.

"Aunt Lydia will interfere," said I. "She'll advise mamma to take away that extra half hour for play in the afternoon. I *wish* we had got mother's signature before she came!"

"Mamma never *really* lets her interfere," said Sue, always my little comforter; "she only listens to please her."

Aunt Lydia was talking very earnestly to our mother, so that when we came in, and had made

our curtseys, and respectfully kissed my aunt's hand, mamma signed to us to wait quietly at the other end of the room till she was at liberty to attend to us. Papa was writing a letter at the table in the window, and we went over to him, and amused ourselves with making impressions on each others' arms with the great seal with his crest upon it. He spoke to us now and then, teasing us about our rules, and suggesting dreadfully strict ones, worse even than any Aunt Lydia herself could have thought of. We were too far off to hear what was being said at the other end of the room; but every now and then we heard mamma cough. Each time she did so, papa glanced anxiously towards her, and then looked out of the window. It was a cold, raw, January day; no snow or frost, but a damp cold, which was very disagreeable.

"Mamma mustn't go out to-day," said I.

"No indeed," answered papa shortly.

"Spring will come soon," was Sue's consoling remark.

"Yes, and bring east winds with it," said papa sighing, as he glanced again towards the sofa where

mamma was lying back now, as if her conversation with Aunt Lydia had tired her. She called us to her, and began to look at our paper of lessons.

"I think there must be some little alteration," she said, smiling at Aunt Lydia, as she passed it to her to read. "You have left no time for the dancing-lessons, or the drawing-class."

"Dancing-lessons!" exclaimed I, who had tried in vain to persuade mamma to send us to the Academy in our little country town, where an old French emigrant taught dancing to the linendrapers' daughters, and any other pupils he could obtain. "O mamma! are you going to have M. Bellairs over here? Well, private lessons will be better than none; but I *don't* see how Sue and I can learn the figures of a quadrille by ourselves."

"Drawing!" exclaimed Sue, crimson with pleasure; for she had a great taste for it, and was never so happy as with a pencil in her hand.

At that moment, Aunt Lydia, to our dismay, deliberately tore our neatly-written paper in four pieces, and told Sue to throw them into the waste-paper basket.

"In *my* schoolroom," she said, "children do not make their own rules ;" but she looked at us so kindly, that though the words were a little alarming, we listened eagerly for the explanation.

When it was given, we received it with very mingled feelings. Mamma was going abroad to escape the east winds, and by the doctor's orders, was not to come home again till May. Sue and I were to be consigned to Aunt Lydia's care for three whole months, but not at Yellowfields ; she had taken a house in town, undertook to give us masters, and lessons of all kinds, and I am sure rejoiced secretly over such an opportunity of carrying out her own views with regard to the education of little girls. Papa had given the scheme his unqualified approval, and declared he was looking forward with the greatest pleasure to three months of mamma's society, undisturbed by those plagues, "the children." But we did not quite believe him, and at all events, felt sure that our mother would rather have had us with her. But complete rest had been ordered, as well as change of climate ; and though we could not, at all understand how lying on the sofa hearing and

teaching us could possibly tire any one, I know now that our lessons must have been a great tax upon her time and strength.

When we were dismissed from the drawing-room that morning, my sister and I walked slowly upstairs to the schoolroom without speaking. We sat down on the broad window-seat—so high, that when we perched there, which we generally did for a consultation, our feet rested on two chairs—and looked at each other in silence. I spoke first.

“Delivered over to her tender mercies entirely ! Did you ever dream they would have the heart to do it ?”

Sue was three years younger than I, but from our always having been together the difference in age made very little difference in anything else. People used to say of us at this time that I was a year and a half too young for thirteen, and Susie a year and a half too old for ten, and that equalised matters between us, I suppose.

“I’m sure her mercies are tenderer than you think for, Gracie,” said Sue, taking, as she always

did, the brightest view of things. "And *did* you hear what she said about the *theatre*?"

"Yes; but then the long, dull days at home; Aunt Lydia is so awfully strict."

"Think of the drawing-class."

"That's for you; I don't care about it."

"Well, but the dancing. And we shall see London. How often we've wanted to go there! I shouldn't wonder if we saw the Lord Mayor and the Queen."

"See London, indeed! Sue, I wonder at you—we shan't see *mamma*, not for three whole months."

Sue's blue eyes filled.

"Ah! but if she comes home strong; if she would only leave that cough behind her, and papa not look in a fuss any more when it's a cold day, I think—yes, I do think I could bear even to go to school."

By degrees I began to dwell more upon the pantomime, the British Museum, the Zoological Gardens, and the dancing, than upon Aunt Lydia's schoolroom; and although we grieved very much over the parting from our parents, still, as was

only natural, we looked forward very much to something so totally new and strange as three months in London. Aunt Lydia would answer no questions. We wondered in vain whether we were to have a governess, or how our days would be passed ; and so in "wondering," and in packing up, and in the fondest of lingering leave-taking of our mother, from whom we had never been parted before, January passed away, and a mild, soft February day dawned upon two very heavy-hearted little women.

The travelling carriage was at the door, and now that the moment had actually arrived, sorrow had the upper hand. It was a consolation to find the first white violet that morning, though the flowers were not open, but only pointed, tight-wrapped buds, and though we stung our hands more than usual with the nettles, because our eyes were dim with tears, causing us to make bad shots at the violets. We gave them to mamma, and received her last kiss. Papa said something merry, at which Sue laughed, because she thought she ought to do so, though tears were rolling down her cheeks ;

and the carriage drove from the door, leaving us standing hand in hand upon the steps.

How well I remember the journey up to London that followed! First came the long drive in Aunt Lydia's carriage to the nearest railway station, and then the train itself, new enough to us to keep us in a great state of excitement. We had only once before taken a railway journey, and the novelty soon chased away our sorrowful feeling. Then Aunt Lydia was so kind and so amusing! She explained everything we saw, made jokes, gave us bonbons, and was altogether so charming, that I began to think "*her* schoolroom" could be no such very awful place after all.

It was dark when we got to town, and the noisy drive through the streets confused our senses and tired us out completely. Aunt Lydia's house was in Portland Place. It belonged to a friend of hers, who was abroad for the winter, and had lent it to our aunt. She would hardly have taken such a large one for herself. We saw nothing very clearly that night but our beds, and a very pleasant sight they were. I don't suppose that in all London there

were two children so soon asleep after first lying down as Susie and I that night.

We were accustomed to early rising, and woke at our usual hour. The first thing was to pull up the window-blinds and look out. We slept in a back room.

“What do you see?” asked Susie, who was putting on her stockings.

“Chimney-pots, and a sparrow—nothing else; but the sparrow is comforting. London must be a dreadful place—there really is nothing but house-tops, Sue.”

“There’s the sky anyway,” answered my sister, coming to peep over my shoulder; “and oh! see that man on a roof far down, what *can* he be doing? And look, Gracie, I can see quite into that window down there; there’s breakfast laid. I can make out books, too; I’m sure it is a school-room. There are flower-plots—ah! some one has shut the window. *A* sparrow, did you say? there’s flocks of them; and the chimneys are all alive—how the tin things on the top twirl in the wind!”

"That one is a man in armour. Look how he threatens, and then turns round in a hurry; that's because he's a coward, and the enemy is approaching."

"I see a cat!" cried Susie; "house-tops are most interesting."

In spite of the attractive sights visible from the window, our toilettes were completed without much delay, and we sallied forth on a voyage of discovery. The first room we entered was a large one on the same floor as our bedroom. There was no mistake about this apartment. "School-room" was plainly proclaimed in the maps hanging on the walls, in the character of the books filling the shelves, in the "backboard"—an instrument of torture which would be new to little girls of the present day, but with which Sue and I were familiar enough—and indeed the whole aspect of the room spoke loudly of governesses and pupils.

"I suppose we shall do lessons here," whispered Sue.

I laughed at her for whispering, but found it unaccountably hard to speak out loud myself.

A formidable list of lessons hung up on one side of the fireplace. We only hoped that Aunt Lydia's fancy for doing things in her own way would keep her from borrowing any hints from the code of laws which had governed our predecessors here.

"Rise at six—In class at 6.30, &c.—Breakfast at eight," I read slowly. "Well, I suppose *we* shall breakfast at eight, and I daresay have it in this room. Aunt Lydia breakfasts at nine herself, I know. I wonder what o'clock it is. Sue, are you hungry?"

"*Hein!*!" exclaimed a voice in the doorway.

We started, and turned round; a good-natured looking foreign maid-servant stood there laughing at us. She complimented us on our early rising, and said she had only now taken warm water to our room, as Madame had bid her let us sleep as long as possible. We ventured to ask the time. It was "nine hours *sonné*," Lisette said, but Madame was fatigued herself, and might be late; should she conduct us to the breakfast-room? We were surprised, but followed her.

No one was in the dining-room, and we amused ourselves for some time with looking over the wire window-blind, and watching what went on in the street. At last Aunt Lydia made her appearance, and seemed quite to expect us to breakfast with her. We had muffins, and coffee with cream in it, at which I secretly wondered, as I remembered once hearing Aunt Lydia advise mamma to draw up a table of meals for us, in which breakfast was to be bread and butter and bread and treacle on alternate days, with milk and water to drink. I fancied the indulgence of this morning was shown to us because it was the first day. After breakfast, we were told that Lisette would always be ready to walk with us at any time.

“I can’t be bothered with children,” said Aunt Lydia, “please yourselves. I only wish you to tell me when you go out, and at what time I am to expect you back. The key of the gardens hangs in the hall. You will have companions there; but if you want to go anywhere else, Lisette knows her way about London. Don’t overtire yourselves. Here is ten shillings for cab-hire, Grace—let me

know when you want more. Luncheon is at two o'clock."

And this was Aunt Lydia, who complained that we had "too much liberty" at home! As she finished speaking she caught up her keys, and was hurrying from the room.

"But, auntie, when are we to do lessons?" cried Susie.

Aunt Lydia's face grew grave; she stood considering for a moment.

"I will arrange your hours presently," she said at length. "Your dancing-lessons will occupy two afternoons in the week, and the drawing-class is fixed for Thursday mornings; meals, recreation, your English studies—you can talk French with Lisette—shall all be written out by and by, when I have time to attend to it. I shall expect you to be obedient and industrious," with which remark she left the room.

I hope we were obedient—we fully intended to be industrious; but, dear little reader, Aunt Lydia *never* "had time to attend it!" During the whole of our stay in Portland Place we continued to break-

fast with her at nine o'clock—we continued to have muffins and coffee, and to enjoy as much liberty as on that first day. We even dined with her at night, unless she dined out, when fascinating little repasts were prepared for us by ourselves. She often spoke of her ideas of discipline for young people, and of the rules she intended to draw up; but her "discipline" was only another name for indulgence. The dancing and drawing lessons were to us the most delightful dissipation, and our severest study was French talking with Lisette.

On looking back to this time that I am writing of, I am inclined to think that when she took possession of us, Aunt Lydia did fully intend to try experiments, and carry out her theories of education, but that, as is often the case, she found theory easier than practice, and was, moreover, so kind and so fond of giving pleasure, that she allowed day after day to slip by without feeling the courage to interfere with our holiday. We used to tell her all we had seen and done, and she would say—

"It has been a successful day, has it? Ah, well! this is Thursday" (or whatever the day was); "on

Monday we will begin to be regular. I dislike a broken week—we will start fair next Monday; you can have holiday till then."

Each Monday morning we felt a little anxious, for fear Aunt Lydia should produce a paper of rules, and we should have to "begin to be regular;" but no, she never did so, and all our weeks in Portland Place were "broken" ones.

Sue and I made good use of our liberty. We went all over London; we saw St Paul's and Westminster Abbey; we spent whole afternoons at the Zoological Gardens; we visited the Soho Bazaar, and went down the river in a penny boat. The Coliseum in the Regent's Park was a very favourite resort of ours. Oh the delights of the subterranean grotto, with stalactites hanging from the roof! Sue was never *quite* sure that we might not be lost in that labyrinth; there was just a sufficient sense of danger to give us a curious thrill of delight at sight of the blue sky and the open door at the end. The Swiss cottage, too, the *real* Swiss house, the lake, the mountains, and waterfall! The Coliseum has been done away with now, and

there will never be any place like it again, just as there will never be any stories like the stories of my childhood, which common objects in my daily life tell to me now. You may be very happy at the Crystal Palace, little folks ; but there—you never were at the Coliseum. I pity you.

Aunt Lydia took us to the pantomime. Not such a pantomime as those you see ; the actors in our's wore grotesque masks, and there was no speaking, only gesture. But we knew quite well all the people meant, and could follow the whole plot. It was not possible to mistake the hero when he threw out his arms wildly, and hit himself such blows upon the chest that I am sure it must have hurt him very much ; it was quite plain that he was madly in love with the young lady in short petticoats, who was lying asleep under the trees. Then clown and pantaloon were much as you see them now—though without dialogue ; and we thought it all very wonderful, and longed to go again. But Aunt Lydia was too wise to take us. I had a headache next day, and, wonder of wonders ! Sue was cross. And considering that

we talked of that pantomime for somewhere about four years, I don't see what we wanted with another. We acted it with the boys in the barn during the midsummer holidays ; we acted it together in Portland Place after we were supposed to be in bed, and our own performance of it never gave us a pain in our heads or our tempers.

The happiest hours that Sue and I passed in London were certainly those spent in the gardens at the top of Portland Place. The first time we entered them, and stood watching groups of children playing "Prisoner's Base," or "Hare and Hounds," we felt a little shy and lonely. But that did not last long ; strangers ran up to us eagerly, asking us to join the game, and we were very soon tearing about as wildly as the rest. Such splendid games of "Prisoner's Base" as were played in those gardens ! —fifteen on a side sometimes. It grew to be the usual thing for three or four little girls to be on the watch for us at the iron gate by the Monument, and even to rush out to meet us, in spite of undignified remonstrances from maids, or awful reprimands from governesses. We used to pity one or

two families of children who were not allowed to play with strangers, and who used to get up quiet games by themselves, or with only such girls as they "knew at home;" but who more often walked rather mournfully up and down the broad walks, or ran a solemn race together, or stood watching us wistfully, till some one came up with the question—

"Will you play?" when they shook their heads, and went shyly away.

Two sisters in particular attracted our attention. They were there every day walking, one on each side of a brown silk governess. By and by the governess used to sit down with a book on one of the iron benches, and then the girls walked all round the gardens by themselves, for it was too early in the year for them to be allowed to read out-of-doors. After every turn of the large garden they came to the bench to report themselves; but while they were out of sight, they often stopped for a moment to watch us at our play. We took a fancy to them. They were both pretty, and seemed so fond of each other, and said "No" so courteously when any one asked them to join a game, looking

all the time so very much as if they would have been glad to do so, that Sue and I grew quite anxious to make their acquaintance. We knew where they lived—only two doors from us—and had looked out their name in Aunt Lydia's red-book! But that was not the hundredth part of an inch to getting intimate, for Aunt Lydia did not know their parents, and declined to follow our suggestion and call upon them. Once, when Lisette came to fetch us home from the gardens, these girls and their governess were leaving at the same time, and we had the satisfaction of walking close behind them all the way home. Lisette was in a hurry ; we should be late for luncheon, she said ; but we would not pass them, for now and then we overheard what they said. We noticed that although the governess was a foreigner, she spoke English, and we thought it very amiable of her. We found out the Christian names of her pupils ; but this was rather a shock to us, for one sister was called Martha, and the other Mary Anne, and we disliked both these names excessively. Martha looked about my age, or a little younger. She had

quantities of light hair falling to her waist. It was not so much the fashion for children to wear their hair in that way then as it is now, and I remember I admired it exceedingly, and felt a little discontented at my own closely-cropped locks. Mary Anne's hair was cut short like our own, but then it curled naturally; and she had blue eyes and a very fair complexion. We did think it such a pity that her name was an ugly one!

The day after that on which we had followed Martha and Mary Anne home was chilly and ungenial. It was late in February now; and though we had had several days of mild, warm weather, things seemed preparing for "March to come in like a lion," and there were very few children in the gardens. Lisette, too, found out that the grass was damp, though in reality it was no damper than it had often been, and besought us to keep to the walks. We promised, and she left us. Our neighbours were walking up and down the broad walk, and we too went there, taking care to arrange matters so that we turned at one end as they turned at the other, and thus we were all obliged

to meet and pass each other midway. A flower-girl stood outside the rails. The chill wind blew her rag of a shawl nearly off her shoulders, and she had a hungry, pitiful look as she offered her bunches of violets—white and purple tied up in separate little bouquets. Martha and Mary Anne caught sight of her just as we all met in the middle of the walk.

“There are some!” exclaimed Martha, joyfully, and the exclamation brought the whole party to a standstill. Sue and I could not help stopping to hear what went on.

“My dear, you have no pennies,” said Madame. “It will be for one other day.”

“What a pity!” sighed Mary Anne, pressing her face against the bars of the gate to smell the violets, and turning round again all over black; “she’s only got two left, you know.”

We wondered what she meant, for the flower-girl’s basket was quite full of little bunches.

“And *they’ll* be dead before night,” said Martha. “Edna would be so glad if we brought

these home. Couldn't the girl follow us to be paid, Madame?"

"*Mais non, non je vous dis*—follow us! *à quoi pensez-vous!* I say to you it will be for one other day: you shall be content. Edna is patient; she waits."

The two girls cast lingering looks at the white violets, but turned away obediently, when, to my excessive surprise, Susie—little, quiet, shy Susie, went up to them with a penny in her hand.

"*I have a penny*," she said; "*please*, buy violets for Edna."

"*Mais qu'est ce que c'est donc?*" cried Madame in shrill treble; "I do not understand. Little girl, what is it that you say?"

But Martha seemed to understand at once.

"We are very much obliged to you," she said; "you overheard us, didn't you? Edna will be pleased—it is white violets that she loves so much;" and then in a few French sentences, rapidly spoken, she explained matters to Madame.

"We shall bring pence to-morrow," said the governess when she understood. "Mademoiselle

is *bien gentille*, but we must pay our debts—she shall not suffer loss," and the brown silk rustled to the gate where the flower-girl stood, still holding out her basket, and anxiously watching what went on.

Martha opened the gate; Mary Anne pressed after her sister; Susie followed, and the finest bunch of white violets was selected. After that, the girls and their governess resumed their walk, and we ran away to join in a game. But before we separated, and while Martha was once more eagerly thanking Susie, and entering into rather lengthy explanations of how she had come to be without money herself that morning, I ventured to remark to Mary Anne—

"Do you know your face is black?"

The remark seemed to startle her; she coloured, and, too shy to be polite, rushed after Madame, though she stood still before she overtook her, and stared at us from a safe distance until Martha joined her.

"How could you?" said I to Susie when we were left alone; "we don't know them."

"Does that matter? I had a penny, and they hadn't, and Edna's two violets would be dead by,

night. I'm so glad! wasn't it nice?" said little Sue with a sigh of contentment.

It chanced that our dancing-classes began the very next day. Hitherto we had been taking private lessons; for as we had lived all our lives in the country, and never even *seen* any dancing, Aunt Lydia had kindly thought we should enjoy the classes more if we knew a little what we were about before joining them. We had a good many surprises and pleasures when we were children, but few surprises have ever been so great or so pleasant as ours was when we found the classes were to be held at the house where Martha and Mary Anne lived! We followed Aunt Lydia with beating hearts. She did not know Mrs Mandeville, and thought it more polite to take us herself, and introduce us for the first time; after that, we went alone always. We were shown into a room on the ground-floor, where the sight of several hats and cloaks and pairs of walking-boots, added to the sound of a piano overhead, told us the lesson had begun. When we entered the drawing-room, about a dozen little girls were all standing on one

leg doing "*battements*," a mysterious performance, in which, owing to our private teaching, Sue and I felt qualified to join. We took our places at once, held out our frocks in the approved fashion, stood firm on our left legs, and pointed our right toes. "*Battements*" always made me think of an old game we played sometimes with the boys. It was called "*Neighbour, lend me horse*," and the horse was wanted to "*work with one as I do!*" While Sue and I "*worked with one*" at our private lessons, we had found it hard to refrain from whispering the words of the game to each other; but we felt no inclination to do so now. We felt a little shy. A great many of the mammas were seated round the room looking on, and the girls were strange, and the very pleasure of seeing Martha and Mary Anne made us feel shy. I and Martha were nearly of a height. I found myself placed beside her. She wore one or two white violets in her waist-belt, and looked pleased to see us; but we could not talk until the time to rest came. Then she shook hands and invited me to sit beside her; and as I saw Susie and Mary Anne making friends at the ,

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other end of the room, I was only too glad to accept the corner of the sofa, and have a little chat. Martha had plenty to say.

"It was so kind of your sister," she began ; "I think she must be a darling. I *hope* there are no more of you ; I shall be so disappointed if there are, for we had quite made up our minds that you were another pair."

I mentioned the boys.

"Oh ! *that* don't matter," said Martha ; "boys don't count. You must come and see Edna after the lesson."

"Doesn't your sister dance—is she ill ?" I asked.

"Ill ? no ; and she *does* dance. Didn't you see her ?"

"But the other," I explained, seeing she was alluding to Mary Anne.

"There *is* no other ; Annie's all the sister I 've got, and enough too. I feel as if another would come between us, somehow."

My new friend now went on to tell me that she and Mary Anne had been as much taken with Susie and me as we had been with them, and had even

asked their mamma to let them speak to us in the gardens.

"But she wouldn't, you know ; I suspect she wanted to surprise us, for of course she knew your names were on the list for the dancing-class. And we *were* surprised when you walked in ; I felt—oh ! I can't say *how* I felt—didn't you ? "

This may not look very lucid written down, but it was quite clear to me, and I answered warmly that "I did." Just then we were called up again, and I had still to learn who Edna was. It seemed as if we were never to find out about her. However, when we had made our last curtsey, and all said, "Good afternoon, Miss Willow," out loud, while we bowed to her in turn (a ceremony which I thought a frightful ordeal, and Sue did not mind in the least), and when the girls raced downstairs to put on their hats, and the mammas exchanged civil farewells, Mrs Mandeville came up to us, and after a few kind words, bade her daughters run upstairs with us to Edna, as Aunt Lydia had said we might stay to tea, "if we liked," Mrs Mandeville added smiling.

Of course we liked very much ; and as we followed our guides to the very top of the tall house, we heard Edna's history.

"She's our cousin, you know," began Martha, though of course we *didn't* know. "There have always been pairs: grandmamma had one sister, mamma had one sister, *I* have one sister." Martha was growing dramatic; she turned to address us from the top step of the third landing—"Mamma loved Aunt Sarah just as Annie and I love each other; and Aunt Sarah died, so Edna came to live with us."

"Then *Edna* isn't a pair," I observed.

Martha sat down upon the top step, and we sank down upon two steps below her. Her manner was impressive; but my attention was divided between what she was saying and the proceedings of Mary Anne, who hung so far over the banisters, I could not help fearing she would take an involuntary plunge down into the hall. At last I got hold of her frock, and then I could listen to Martha with a quieter mind.

"Edna is *more* than a pair," she said solemnly,

"she's a twin. And that's why she loves white violets. We try to keep her supplied with them. It was scarlet fever, and they both had it, and my aunt caught it nursing them. And Violet and my aunt died, and Edna will never be strong. Mrs Pettifer—that's our housekeeper—says twins never do thrive when the other of them is 'gone before' —that means 'dead,' you know."

Martha never expressed herself very clearly ; at least, I am afraid it may seem so to *you* ; to us, what she said was clear enough.

"Is she ill, then ?" asked Sue.

"No," said Martha.

"Yes," said Mary Anne at the same moment.

"Neither ill nor well," explained the elder sister ; "they call it *ailing*, and it is very uncomfortable. It means a great deal of lying on the sofa, and never going out—that's bad ; and lessons only when she likes—that's good ; and no parties, or dancing, or good things to eat—that's bad ; and being the pet of all the house, and I'm sure *that's* good."

But about the violets ?" said Sue.

"Oh! her sister's name was Violet, and she had white ones in her hand when she died, and they put white ones in her coffin, you know. Come on!" and with a startling change of manner Martha sprang to her feet, and raced all the rest of the way upstairs.

Madame was conscientious. Her first question, when we got to the schoolroom, was whether Susie's loan had been repaid. Mary Anne produced a penny, but Edna paid for her violets with kisses. She looked very like a white violet herself. A little, pale girl, with large, dark eyes; a gentle, patient, winning little creature, who seemed to be the good genius of the house, and made her presence felt all through it in the same sweet, silent way as that in which the scent of her favourite flowers betrayed *their* presence always. They were all so fond of her, and Sue and I did not wonder at it. That London schoolroom soon grew as familiar to us as our own schoolroom at home. At first Susie was a little afraid we might be expected to talk French; but Madame generally spoke English to "improve herself"—if it did not benefit her pupils much, it

was very pleasant to us. Sometimes Edna would steal downstairs on dancing-days, and look on for a few moments ; but the music, and the movement, and the buzz of conversation always tired her very soon, and she would creep quietly back to her sofa upstairs. She always had one or two of her violets in her hand, caressing them—talking to them, we used to say ; the others were in water on her little table, and from amongst them she used to take two fresh ones when those she held were faded and quite dead. The doctor came to see her often ; we became quite accustomed to his visits, and her cousins thought nothing of it. Now and then she went out a drive with her aunt, or was persuaded to spend an hour in the drawing-room ; but for the most part she was on the sofa always, and always with white violets near her. As Sue and I left London in May, we never saw her without those flowers ; so it is not wonderful that the story a white violet tells me should be a story of little Edna, and of Martha and Mary Anne, of Madame in her schoolroom, of happy meetings in Portland Gardens, and of spring in London. I

have said that I used to tell tales to Roger and Ned and Susie ; it was soon found that I could please Edna no better than by telling tales to her. I seem now to feel the little, thin arm thrown round my neck, as I sat on the floor beside her, and the tickling of the violets held in her hot hand, as they now and then touched my face. Martha and Mary Anne, in holland pinafores much splashed with ink, pretended to do lessons, assuring Madame that I did not interrupt them. But they, and Madame herself, for that matter, used to listen by stealth. Never was any governess so good-natured as poor Madame ; to this day I have a respect for a governess in a brown silk dress.

Our games in the gardens were over now. Strangers could not entice us away from our new friends. It was a blank day if the Mandevilles did not appear ; and I remember distinctly the sort of thrill of joy with which we used to catch sight of certain green stuff-frocks they wore, as they waited for us near the Monument. Sue used to say the fluttering feeling was "a blackbird in her heart !" When I see children nowadays joining

company in the London squares, looking a little demure, exchanging greetings, flushing up with rosy pleasure, and going off together arm in arm, I know *just* how it feels; I think of Martha and Mary Anne. And when *they* see it, I fancy they think of us; for it was a very real friendship that sprang up between us, and lasted long; and though our paths in life separated widely, yet I feel almost sure that to this day they, like myself, can hardly have their attention turned to girl-friends, or certainly, can hardly pass the old gardens where the lilacs still blossom every spring, and where the Monument still stands at the gate, without just a little faint fluttering of Sue's "blackbird at the heart!"

Well, it is time I brought this story to an end; I linger over it because the end is sad.

Sue and I had good accounts of mamma; she was getting quite strong and well. We had long letters from the boys, too; they spent their Easter holidays at a friend's in the country, so that we did not see them; and in spite of our real grief at parting from the Mandevilles, we were very truly happy when the day came on which we were to

meet all our dear ones again. Mamma and papa were home first; Aunt Lydia took us down to join them the day after their return. We went over early in the morning to take leave of our friends. The schoolroom breakfast was going on. Edna looked hot and feverish; Madame grumbled as she gave me a fourth cup of tea to carry to the little girl, and said she had eaten nothing. It was May then. The sun was hot, and Madame said the schoolroom was too near the roof, and therefore unpleasantly warm. Sue and I promised to send Edna fresh white violets as soon as we got home.

"It was *all* owing to your penny—all owing to violets; and you're a dear!" cried Martha hugging Susie.

"We should have known each other without that," said Sue, "because of the dancing."

We made many plans for future meetings, some of which were really carried out, while others were most pleasant castles-in-the-air, and at last tore ourselves away. As we afterwards heard, the very moment we were gone, and the breakfast-table

cleared, Martha and Mary Anne sat down to write to us!—we got their letters next day.

I will not tell you of our joyful home-coming, because the violets do not speak to me of that, and this is their story ; but it was *so* joyful ! There was so much to tell and to hear that for a few days we thought less of the Mandevilles, and did not remember our promise to send country violets to Edna until we had been at home more than a week.

And then, dear little reader, Sue and I could hardly see the fair white flowers growing amongst the nettle-leaves under the hedge, because of tears which almost blinded us, for our white violets were wanted to place in the coffin of our little friend, and to lie in her dead hands. Martha wrote to us—a queer, ill-spelt, blotted letter—Edna had died three days after we last saw her, and white violets were scarcely to be had in London now ; would we send those we had promised ? Under the cool shade of the nettle-leaves a few of the sweet flowers were still to be found, and those few we sent ; and I think the

sorrow that we shared with our two friends, cemented the friendship between us more than many joys would have done. We never forgot—we never *could* forget now, the chance meeting in Portland Gardens, and all that came of Susie's penny and the bunch of white violets.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KETTLE'S STORY.

IT tells a story to every one—that is, to every one who has lived long enough to have learnt the language a kettle, or other such common household object, speaks in. A story, perhaps, of cheerful firesides—of a nursery grate guarded by high fender and garlanded with chubby little faces—or of a weary, midnight watch in a sick-room—or of an early breakfast on some cold, dull morning in the old coaching-days. To me it tells a story of its own; as it sits singing on the hob, and puffing out great jets of steam, I hear a familiar voice—

“ Herc I am, old friend ! Don’t you remember all about it?—he told her not to touch, and he *would* try experiments—and oh, how silly he looked ! and *she* screamed, you know. This was how it was, if you remember right ; and if *you* don’t, *I* do, so *I* ’ll just tell you.”

And then it chirps away, and I find it hard to listen to what is going on around me, because I am already listening to the kettle; the steam comes in some peculiar way and fills all the room, or seems to do so, and I fancy Roger and Ned are moving about in it, and Sue is curled up on the hearth-rug, and Martha Mandeville's voice is heard.

Martha was staying with us at the time. Mary Anne had the measles, and after Martha had been in quarantine for some days, so as to make sure that *she* was not going to have them too, she came to stay with us. And very glad we were to have her. It was the Christmas holidays, which made it all the more dull for poor Anne, but then all the more merry for us, for the boys were at home, and there were no lessons to do.

Roger had come home with a rage for experiments. He was going to Oxford that year, and Sue and I thought him a man. Really it makes me laugh when I remember how very old a person of eighteen appeared to us then! It is useful, though, to have such a distinct remembrance of how venerable Roger was in our eyes, and how

much we looked up to him, because it teaches me to know exactly how very differently children look upon a youth of that age to the way in which their elders regard the same individual. Martha was actually shy of Roger ; she thought him quite grown up. Ned, who was two years younger, and in character and disposition younger even than his years, was quite one of us children ; and though he and Roger were a great deal together, still, when Ned joined us, we did not feel that he was condescending as we did when Roger offered to walk with us, or invited us into his study.

A queer place that "study" was ! Truth compels me to admit that before it was a study it had been a cupboard—a large, light cupboard, opening from the boys' room, and used as a receptacle for their school-boxes, their bats, and every other kind of possession. But Roger, one holiday, when I suppose he was beginning to feel "grown up," turned out all the boxes, covered one side of the wall with shelves for his books, persuaded the old house-carpenter to make the window open and shut, and these improvements effected, discovered

that there was room for a chair (a shelf under the window did duty for a table) and an awful little stove, whose long pipe ran out of a hole above the window, so that all the smoke that *did* choose to go that way—and as a rule, Roger's smoke preferred filling the study and bedroom—was blown back again through the window. The stove was not wanted for warmth, but for "experiments." There was always something dreadful on it, that "went off" if you touched it, and very often when you *didn't* touch it. Explosions were so frequent that my mother soon ceased to be alarmed at them, and when a sudden report was heard in the drawing-room, would say contentedly—

"It's only Roger."

No harm ever happened, so mamma was justified in her composure; but if Aunt Lydia was in the house when an explosion took place, she always came upstairs to see who was killed. We were a great deal at Yellowfields those holidays. Sue and I had left the last shred of fear of Aunt Lydia behind in Portland Place. She might look her sternest, but we dreaded nothing; for we had learnt

to know that the queer look in her eyes, as if she were trying to be cross, betokened some pleasure for us preparing in secret. Sue's conscience had been rather uneasy at our long holiday in London in the spring; but on talking it over with mamma, we found it was exactly what she had expected.

"If you have learnt to hold up your heads and walk across the room like ladies, and if Susie can draw a straight line at last, so that I can feel easier about the poor little men walking near her houses and churches—they used to seem to me in dreadful danger of being crushed by falling walls—and if you have both learnt to believe in Aunt Lydia, *I* don't think the three months wasted," she said; adding, that if *we* had any qualms of conscience on the subject, the remedy was in our own hands—we could work all the harder during the summer.

And we *did* work hard. We drew up a most amazing paper of rules; and as we refused to believe mamma when she warned us how irksome we should find them, she made little or no alteration, but signed her name, and left us to discover our

mistake for ourselves. Fortunately the boys came home early in July : we had not much more than two months in which to suffer for our folly ; but never shall I forget how glad we were to tear up that dreadful paper, or how humbly we received all mamma's suggestions for the autumnal one ! But as I have said, lessons were over again now and it was Christmas-time.

A beautiful Christmas ! Frost and snow ; good skating on the ponds ; a white world, just as there ought to be at that time of the year. Roger and Ned taught us to skate ; and Martha got so many falls she grew discouraged, and relapsed ignominiously into sliding ; but Sue, persevering in the conscientious way in which she devoted herself to anything, whatever it might be, that she undertook, grew to be the best skater of us all. We three girls had tea in the schoolroom, and it was our pleasure to boil the kettle ourselves. When we came in cold and hungry in the winter twilight, it was a pleasant sight to see the table spread, and the kettle standing ready filled. We generally sat down before it till it boiled, on the hearthrug, and

chatted or told stories. The candles were never lit until tea was ready, but the firelight flickered through the room, and threw our shadows on the wall and ceiling—great giant shadows, leaping as the flames leapt. Martha, in her black frock, sat between Sue and I. Now and then we talked of Edna, and then Martha would wipe away a few tears; and as the firelight played upon her little figure and long, fair hair, it would betray that she was crying, and Sue and I would do our best to comfort her, while the kettle began to sing, and the jets of steam to come curling and wreathing round it. Often we talked of what we would do when we grew up; and I never see a kettle on the hob without recalling those winter evenings, and beginning to build castles in the air, forgetting that it is too late to do that now.

It was generally after tea, and before the late dinner, that Roger used to invite us into the study. He gave lectures on chemistry there; but I was always too much occupied in watching the stove, for fear anything should go off, to profit by them. I can't say either that we were *in* the study, for it

would not hold us. Roger was there, between stove and table, and one victim, generally Susie, who was requested to hold something or other, or to pour drops from a wicked-looking little bottle on to some wonderful preparation; and as the effect of the drops was always to make the preparation fizz or explode, *I* never cared to be the lecturer's assistant if I could help it. The rest of the audience—that is, Martha and *I*—stood in the doorway, great, strong Ned, with his arms outstretched, standing behind us to keep us there; for I must confess, that the moment Roger touched the stove, or began to stir a “preparation,” we showed a great inclination to back into the large bedroom. How *I did* dread it, when I heard Roger say—

“And now for the practical illustration. I take this powder, you observe,” &c.

Once, just as he began in this way, the “powder” vanished—went off with a loud report—he *couldn't* “take it.” The little den was filled with thick smoke. Martha was seen lying face downwards on the floor!

I really thought something dreadful had happened this time.

"O Martha, Martha! are you hurt?" I cried in great dismay.

"Hurt? no," she answered, as she slowly picked herself up; "I only threw myself down for safety. I've heard it's the best plan; face downwards on the floor directly. Are my eyebrows gone?"

"Your eyebrows gone?" said Ned staring; "no; why should they be?"

"People's eyebrows mostly are singed off with chemical experiments, I believe," replied Martha calmly.

Ned laughed, and said that might be true for the people who were conducting the experiments, and held their faces over explosive powders; the audience were always safe enough. It was some time before the smoke cleared away sufficiently enable us to see if Roger's eyebrows still adorned his countenance, but we heard him scolding Sue, and opening the window and fussing about generally; so we hoped he was all right, as indeed he was. I don't know *why* he should have scolded

Sue, as she had nothing to do with the explosion ; but he mostly did scold some one when any experiment failed.

One evening, to vary the course of lectures, he gave one upon steam. Our tea-kettle suggested it. Ned and he had been out late, and came in wet and cold. The kettle was just on the boil as we heard the door slam that led from the park into a long stone passage, out of which the schoolroom opened, and Sue and I ran out to beg our brothers to come and have a cup of hot tea. They were quite glad of it ; and as Roger leaned against the mantelpiece, slowly sipping the refreshing beverage, his attention was attracted by the lid of the kettle, which was moving about, and giving little spasmodic jumps, as kettle-lids are in the habit of doing when the water is almost ready to boil over.

“We must take it off,” said Sue ; but Roger stayed her hand as she was going to lift the kettle from the fire, and launched out at once upon his lecture. He told us a great deal about James Watt, and about steam in general ; but I could not listen, because it was really necessary to watch the

kettle, and take it off before it actually boiled over, put out the fire, and perhaps scalded Roger's legs. However, he was watching also, and lifted it from the coals before any catastrophe occurred.

I had no business really to be afraid of Roger's chemistry, because he was always most careful of us ; and as I have said, no accident ever did occur as long as he was lecturer, whether on steam or anything else. It was a different matter when Ned took it into his head to emulate his elder brother's proceedings ! Ned once made a steam-engine, it was intended to run upon the schoolroom table, but it wouldn't act, and we all got scalded in the attempt to make it. I remember how Roger, coming in and finding Sue patiently holding the steaming kettle by Ned's side, took it out of her hand, and told Ned "not to be an ass." But one evening when Roger was dining at Yellowfields with my father and mother, an accident occurred at last, which put an end to master Ned's performances in this line.

He had been out with us girls on a long expedition after some famous holly said to grow in a wood

three miles away. We found the holly, and cut great bunches of it to carry home ; but the long tramp through the mud was very tiring—there had been a thaw, and, instead of clean white snow and nice hard roads, there was nothing but mud. Sue was tired out, and I fell behind Martha and Ned, who were walking together, to encourage her and help her as best I could. It grew dusk ; the distance had been much greater than we had had any idea of, and it would be quite dark before we got home.

“ Come on ! ” shouted Ned from out the twilight, as Martha and he, far ahead of us now, paused for a moment. “ Run, girls. How do you suppose I 'm to be home in time to dress at this rate ? ”

“ There 's no run in me,” answered poor Susie with a laugh, though she was *so* tired that no one but her would have had any laugh in her either.

“ Go on without us,” said I, as we drew nearer, though I never believed he really would do so, as ~~Mamma~~ did not allow us to be out after dark without the boys to take care of us. Martha did not know this, however, and nothing ever tired her.

She said it would be a pity to be too late for his dinner-party, and he had really better run off.

“Well, you’re not beat,” said Ned ; “you’re a famous walker; come on with me, it’s close now. Grace will take care of Susie,” and they set off together.

I could not help feeling a little hurt that Martha should leave us, and said so to Sue, as I drew her arm in mine and we trudged wearily on.

“Don’t you know why? She’s a visitor; he couldn’t leave her, it would be rude; and she is so good-natured, she was afraid he would stay out of politeness, and so lose his party. Martha would *rather* have stopped with us, I know.”

“O Sue! you little comfort!” I exclaimed, and could not resist standing still to kiss her in the dark; for I had had a little pain in my heart at the conduct of my friend, and was glad to have it explained away. We said nothing more after this. Sue was too tired to talk. It grew darker and darker; the holly-boughs I carried were dreadfully in the way,

but I thought we should look so silly if we reached home without them after all the trouble we had taken. However, we *all* carried branches, mine would not be much missed : I dropped them in the road, feeling glad that it was too dark for Susie to see me do it.

"It's not much further now," chirped Susie, hearing me sigh heavily. "How nice tea will be after this ! Shan't you be glad to see the kettle, and oh ! aren't you glad *we* are not grown up and going to dine out ?"

A shadow came looming through the darkness : a labourer, I hoped ; a burglar, or a tipsy man, I feared. My heart stood still when the shadow stumbled and recled as a drunken man might do ; but it began to beat again at the sound of Ned's voice, for Ned it was.

He was very cross indeed. Not only had my father reprimanded him for leaving us alone, but he had been sent back to fetch us ; and now whether we got home in time for him to dress or not, there was to be no dinner-party for him. He had stumbled too, and his feet were entangled in

something or other that was lying in the road. When he put his hand down to grasp it, he made a very angry exclamation indeed, for it pricked him.

“ Why, it 's holly ! ” cried Sue, who was of course crouching in the road to help him, “ a great bundle of it.”

Ned bade her get up and come on ; and giving an arm to each of us he strode on so fast that Susie had a bad pain in her side before we were home.

But oh, how comfortable the schoolroom looked that night ! The fire burning so brightly, its light glancing on the cups and saucers, reflected back from the gilt picture-frames, and playing over Martha as she sat on the rug watching the boiling of the tea-kettle. It was pleasant after all to have her to welcome us, and fuss over us, and help us to get off our wet things, while she described her own reception as she and Ned had come into the hall.

“ Your father actually met us on the door-step,” she said. “ I quaked. He packed Ned off directly,

and when I tried to say something—he—only fancy girls ! I *was* so scared."

"Why, what did he do ?" I asked anxiously ; "he didn't scold *you*, surely ?"

"Scold? no ; he—*made me a bow*!—I *was* frightened ; I scurried upstairs at once. And Ned is to have tea with us, and not go to Yellow-fields ; though if he was as quick as needles, there *is* time to dress."

I don't think it was much punishment to Ned. I know we were very merry, and we all made so much of him, to console him for the disappointment, that I really fancy it must have been pleasanter for him than sitting in Aunt Lydia's drawing-room, turning over old albums, with every page of which he was familiar, for that was his usual way of spending the evening at one of Aunt Lydia's large parties.

"Where's the holly?" was Sue's first question when we came down tidy and comfortable to find Ned lying back at his ease in the big arm-chair, and Martha waiting on him. "Where's the holly? the rest of it, I mean," and she held up two magni-

ficient branches laden with red berries, which, having been intrusted to *her* care, had, as a matter of course, reached their destination in safety. It wanted only three days of Christmas-day, and our wearisome expedition had been undertaken with a view to the wreaths and garlands we intended putting up about the house. "Christmas decorations" were not, either in churches or houses, what they have since become. Great bunches of holly, brilliant with the flash of its red berries and the shine of its glossy leaves, and contrasting beautifully with the light-greens of bay-leaves or laurel, were considered quite artistic enough even in church ; and *our* church, I can answer for it, used to look lovely with such masses of green over every old monument, and with little sprigs stuck in all the pew-doors, and a perfect bush in the pulpit. Much *more* artistic indeed—or at least much more picturesque and striking than the thin, straggling wreaths, the crowns and crosses of the present day. Poor berries ! poor leaves ! they *can't* like it, you know. Picked off one by one and *threaded* ! It's not natural, now ; *is* it ? *Our* evergreens looked

free and beautiful in church in the graceful forms they grew in of themselves ; and if a draught of fresh, cold wind swept in to see that all was right, the leaves and branches stirred, as they did too when the organ—a hand-organ, I confess, it was—sounded, and every one stood up to sing “Hark ! the herald,” &c. A wreath was considered a work of high art in those days, and Sue and I one Christmas had wreathed the stone pillars of the church ; but then *we* did not dream of stripping the poor, dear laurel-boughs, and tacking each separate leaf on to a strip of green braid ! *Our* leaves were still green, living things when they were put up, not murdered with needle and thread ; our wreaths were composed of little branches tied loosely and carefully together, so that the garland was thick and “fat,” as we used to say, all its length, and never stiff or formal for an inch of it, but with twigs and branches, and pert little happy-looking boughs sticking out freely just as they would. It was to make such a wreath as this that we had taken our long walk in the mud and cold.

Ned laughed at Susie's question.

"You don't suppose I took the trouble to carry the stuff home?" he said. "I threw it away when we had to run; but I took care none of you girls should see me. There'll be enough without mine."

"Well now!" exclaimed Martha, who was bringing Ned a cup of tea, and emphasised her remarks by pointing at him with it, "I call that mean. You had the most. You are the strongest. I should have thought that *you*!"—

"Give me my tea, please," interposed Ned. "Where's *your* holly?"

Martha demurely echoed his own words.

"Mine? I dropped it soon *after* we had to run; there'll be enough without mine," and she calmly turned her attention to bread-and-butter.

"The girls had lots," observed Ned, sipping his tea leisurely. "There'll be a famous wreath for the drawing-room mirror, anyway; show us your bundle, Gracie."

After the confessions of the other two, I had no shame in owning what I had done, and it turned out that only conscientious Sue had brought home

any holly at all. We had a good laugh over this ; and then, when tea was finished, we gathered round the fire to chat. Ned had been lying back in the arm-chair, gazing thoughtfully at the blaze for some moments, when he suddenly bent forward and put the kettle on again.

“What’s that for ?” I asked.

He did not condescend to explain, but told Sue to go to Roger’s study and fetch some sulphuric acid and some chlorate of potash. It took her some time to learn the names, and indeed she brought wrong little bottles the first time, and had to go back again for the right ones. Before Ned was supplied with all he wanted, the kettle was steaming and singing on the hob in fine style.

“I am going to show you a little experiment,” began Ned, with a curious imitation of Roger’s manner, and mixing his ingredients as he spoke.

“Please don’t,” said I. Practical illustrations were bad enough with Roger, but with Ned were something awful.

“Oh ! I see,” remarked Martha quietly ; “he’s read the last number of *Household Words* ; we

are to be edified with the sight of a Fire Annihilator. But there was ever so much besides sulphuric acid and—what 's-his-name?"

"Not much besides. Of course I can't exhibit it on a large scale, but small things illustrate great; and—now, Grace, *don't* be a donkey! it will all take place in the fender."

But it *didn't*.

However, I sat down again in despair, while Martha, who was never afraid of anything, and Sue, who, whether she was afraid or not always did as she was bid, handed the lecturer all he asked for.

"When you 've annihilated the fire, I hope you 'll light it again," said Martha, "or we shall be driven to sit in the kitchen—it 's a cold night."

"I am not going to annihilate *the* fire, but Fire," explained Ned, speaking with a very large capital "F" in his voice. He tore up pieces of newspaper, and set light to them in a corner of the fender—the sulphuric acid, and the "what 's-his-name," as Martha called it, were already in the kettle, which was sending forth jets of steam.

"The thing now is to bring the steam to bear upon the flames," said Ned seizing the kettle; "you will perceive that they sink at once."

Yes, undoubtedly that *was* the thing; but the bits of newspaper burnt so fast that the flames "sank" before the kettle was fairly off the hob. The experiment must be repeated, and this time with more paper. Hastily the lecturer tore large pieces from the *Times*. Martha applied a match—the kettle was ready.

"Oh, stop!" cried I. "O Ned, look there!"

The rest of the *Times* had caught; I was rushing upon it with the large sofa-cushion. I *knew* it was the right thing to do, but Ned ordered me back.

"Grace, let it alone. I *desire* you to let it alone!" he shouted. I drew back, he advanced with his kettle, and took aim at the flaming *Times* with the steam. But unfortunately the fire would not wait, or all might have been well. In an instant the old chair-cover was alight, and then the window-curtain. Both were of chintz, thin, and dry as tinder; the flames ran up to the curtain-pole in a

moment ; Ned dashed the kettle at them ; Sue screamed ; Martha flung open the door, thereby creating a fine draught, wherewith to fan the flames, and I half tore the bell down with my frantic ringing of it. The servants came running ; there was a scene of confusion. Happily it was soon over, the fire was got under, and we were left, half drowned with the water that had been dashed over everything, dreadfully frightened, and with the old chair-cover and one window-curtain annihilated instead of the fire ! As the confusion subsided, poor dear Susie's little gentle voice was heard—

“ Gracie, what 's good for a scald ? ”

No wonder she had screamed ! One foot and leg were badly scalded with the boiling water, when Ned had thrown the kettle bodily at the conflagration. How sorry he was, to be sure, for the mischief he had done ! and how patiently he waited on Sue, and devoted himself to her as long as her poor leg kept her on the sofa, which was for nearly three weeks ! What my father said when he came home that night, and Ned met him in the hall with his confession, I don't know, but the boy was .

in a wonderfully subdued frame of mind all the rest of the holidays, and our schoolroom had new curtains and chair-cover, and Ned no pocket-money to speak of, at which we were wise enough not to express any surprise.

We had no more practical illustrations for some time, but often and often since that day has a kettle singing on the hob repeated to me the story of Ned's Fire Annihilator.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.—AT COURT.

THE schoolroom in Portland Place was “Court;” Her Majesty wore a brown silk gown; in point of fact, it was Madame. She stood in the corner by the piano, and Martha and I swept past her, practising our Court curtseys. One of us had a drab shawl, and the other the table-cloth, pinned to her dress to represent trains. Mary Anne and Sue *would* laugh! It might be all very well for them to treat the affair as a joke, it was a serious matter to us; we were to be presented the next day. Madame also was very much in earnest; she held out her hand with regal dignity.

“*Bien, tres-bien; mais pliez donc, mademoiselle!*” is it that you have pokares in your legs, *ma chère*? Ah! ”—for Martha, tottering as she bent, caught hold of royalty to break the fall she felt was impending, and nearly brought Her Majesty to the ground.

Meantime I, backing gracefully from the presence, backed most *ungracefully* into my table-cloth, and collapsed into a heap at Sue's feet.

"Oh dear me!" sighed Martha; "what *is* the good of being in a fuss? When the time comes, it will come quite naturally, you 'll see."

"The time?" asked Madame; "and for why should it come *unnaturally*?—I do not understand."

"No, the curtseys: we shall do as well as any one else. Don't you wish you were going, girls?"

"No," answered Mary Anne very decidedly.

"I don't know," said Sue; "in some respects it would be a bore. I prefer Portland Gardens and liberty to the Queen's drawing-room and balls with—what shall I say?—propriety; but then Grace and I have always been together; I can't help being a little bit sorry that we have come to a place where our lives divide."

"And mine and Annie's too," remarked Martha in her usual vague fashion; "but she and I will not be so long apart as you and Sue will be, Gracie—there 's only a year between *us*."

It was too true: we were grown up—more's the pity. I was seventeen, and our parents had taken a house in town in order to let me be presented at Court, and go through all the pleasures of a London season. A daily governess and masters had been engaged for Susie. She, in one sense, was more grown up than I was—a tall, thin girl, nearly a head taller than myself, only her short frocks proclaimed her to be fourteen, and my dresses had been short too till yesterday—to-day they touched the ground.

“It will always be the same,” said I, struggling out of the table-cloth, and feeling rather hurt by Sue's speech about divided lives; “we shall be just as much together as we always have been.”

Sue lifted up the skirt of her cotton dress and let it fall again.

“It would look well following your silks and satins into a ball-room. No, Gracie dear, we have come to a new chapter, and you mustn't mind it. Keep up your spirits, and do justice to Miss Willow.” She smiled and kissed me, but there was a little sad feeling in my heart, which was perhaps

just as well, for it prevented my being *too* much taken up with my Court dress, or too excited when envelopes, hard and stiff, containing cards of invitation to balls or parties, came to the house. All through that season I used to feel a little touch of melancholy, because these invitations, so welcome to me, were nothing to Sue—did not concern her at all.

Martha and I were often glad to escape to the gardens for an afternoon with our younger sisters, or to take our old places at Madame's tea-table. But Susie was right: we had come to a new chapter, our lives were never quite so undivided as before. She had nearly three years of schoolroom work before her after I came out; and even in the country it was never quite the same again. I went from home on visits with our parents, and oftener still on longer ones under Aunt Lydia's chaperonage. True, I told my adventures, and Sue told hers, but we had not “done it all together” as of old—*telling* was a very different matter; and before Susie was old enough to go into society I was married.

Therefore it is time to lay down the pen and bring these stories to an end, or the title of my little book will be true no longer. The day on which I went to Court in the schoolroom, and Susie looked on laughing, was the last on which I could say in speaking of every adventure, every event, every hour almost of my daily life—"Sue and I."

More than this: the common objects that I see, and that tell so many stories to me, tell them always of childish days—days before I wore my first Court dress, and when Roger and Ned, as well as Sue and I, all shared one home. So you see it is quite time to stop.

When you are as old as I am, keep your ears open; the tea-kettle, and violets, cotton frocks, six-pences, and such-like things, will have tales to relate to you also; and if your lives are good and happy now, why, the brighter and pleasanter will be in days to come "the stories they tell you."

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